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Vol. XXVII No. 10 **OCTOBER 1966**

Vive le Roi	**Winston Graham**	**2**
	Illustrations by Joy Funnell	
An Abyssinian Affair	**Darrell Bates**	**15**
Stone Boy	**Gina Berriault**	**21**
Our Very First Car	**Hugh Tracey**	**33**
Gay Dogs		**42**
My Father	**Pavel Vezhinov**	**45**
Fencing Master	**Gilbert Rogin**	**69**
Tomorrow is a Million Years	**J. G. Ballard**	**71**
A Modern Rake's Progress	**Roy Dewar**	**84**
The Devil and Democracy	**Brian Cleeve**	**88**
Terror on a Tape	**Kenneth Bird**	**103**
When Eight Bells Toll (*First Part*)	**Alistair MacLean**	**108**
	Cover Design and Illustration by Bryn Havord	
Book Reviews	**Arthur Pottersman**	**156**
Argosy Crossword		**160**

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BY WINSTON GRAHAM

VIVE LE ROI

THE King was going: everyone knew that. The only question was when. The physicians said it might be a week yet; but William and Henry, watching each other across the sick bed, thought, What if he dies without sharing out, what if he sinks into a coma and slips away and nothing settled? Twice they'd tried to get round to the subject, but they couldn't press too hard because the lion still lived and had a growl on him they recognised.

He'd repented of his mistakes on Sunday, repented like a stout sulky boy, with all his monks and his priests nodding their tonsured heads and whispering yes, yes, in unctuous sibilant approval; he'd agreed to the release of all those high-up people who had grown sallow in grim castles for more than twenty years.

But it had been grudging, a reluctant giving in to Christian impulses that came to him from outside. In many ways he was a pious God-fearing man, but he'd never taken kindly to suggestions from other people. This morning for a while he was nearly his old self, sitting up for a few minutes, snapping at his chief prelates and barons, ordering up the barber to trim his moustache, sucking at a bowl of soup and watching the zealous attentions of his followers out of those small stern bloodshot eyes which for sixty years had done him well. He'd judged men with them, assessing which were his enemies and which his friends, deciding if he could cheat this one with

promises or lure that one with gold. And he'd made few mistakes. It didn't pay to make mistakes.

Clear-sighted, people thought him. Well, he was clear-sighted enough to know this hint of recovery wasn't going to last; the lump in his side was no better, and he knew all his greatness, all his money, all his lands, wouldn't save him now by so much as a day.

It was a pity, he thought, a crying cursing pity how he'd come to this state, for he was vigorous enough in other ways and might have lasted another ten years. Cousin Philip, might he rot, had been the cause of it all. It was that cheap joke that had started it. Yes, he was fat, sizable round the stomach like many a lusty man in his later prime. And because he'd been ill and forced to keep his bed a week or two, Philip of France had cracked the joke. He'd said that the King was a long time lying-in and no doubt there'd be a fine churching when he was delivered. Venom carries quickly on the tongue, and when the King heard it he went purple up to the ears and swore by the birth of God that he'd be churched in Philip's own cathedral. Philip's cathedral not being as yet in reach, he had fallen on Mantes to begin and had burnt and butchered until nothing was left except ashes and the spread-eagled corpses of the people who had lived there. It was not pretty, but it was his way: it had always been his way. You couldn't expect a change at his time of

life. But this time, just this once, things hadn't gone right. Riding up to see for himself, as he always did, he had put his horse on to hot cinders and been thrown. So this rupture and slow mortification.

And on the whole he judged better than his surgeons how much time was left. That morning he thought a fortnight more and perhaps with an effort he'd see his sixtieth birthday, but in the night he had a terrible dream and woke in sweat, knowing the worst. He said nothing to Peter the monk, nor anything to Gilbert the bishop who had stayed up to pray at his bedside and fallen asleep there. But next morning early he sent word that they were all to come.

They crowded into his chamber, the priests and the nobles, pushing each other, as they thought, unnoticed, and edging for position about the bed. Then he sent for his two sons.

They came quickly enough. They'd not been out of arrow-shot for a week and they came solicitously, anxiously, submissively, saving their sharp looks for each other. The King stared at them, and then he glanced up at the rest. Already, he thought, while the breath's still in the body, they stand in little groups, one against another. What when my hand has gone—will it all be as before?

"Yes, Father?" said Henry. "I hope you're no worse? Give us that assurance, I pray you."

The King said: "I'm one day nearer death," and raised his voice. "This is my last will. Hear you all."

Instant silence fell, the whispering and scuffling died in a second, noise seemed to run away from the bed and escape at the door like wind from a balloon. The King knew the expectancy, but did not hurry himself. He looked again at his two sons, at their bent heads beside the bed, at once separated and united by the bed. Was it the only link? The two youngest of four: Richard caught by a stag, its horn had came out of his back; Robert—Robert Short Legs—ill-disciplined, rowdy, rebellious, chivalrous, lazy Robert, curse him, absent as usual.

"To my eldest son Robert," he said, "though he's borne arms against me and has been unfilial to the end, I leave this Duchy of Normandy. It fulfils a promise long made."

He stopped, and one of the apothecaries gave him a sip of cordial. No-one spoke, though glances went about, minds quick to think how the succession would affect them.

"My kingdom," he went on. "My kingdom I give to no-one, though I'll leave it to him who can hold it, as I held it,

with my sword. If God wills, I think that that one should be William, who has campaigned with me and served me well and on the whole been dutiful to me all his life."

His son took a deep slow breath and raised his close-cropped, wide-browed head, his truculent, sourly-swelling face. Enough—it was enough. He could hold it as his father had done, and if blood ran on the floor it should not be his. His eyes met those of Henry, clashed a moment and then turned towards the old man. The King was lying back with closed eyes, a trickle of moisture at the corner of his mouth. The virtue had gone out of him.

"And what," said Henry, his voice cracking a little, "and what do you leave to me, Father?"

The King irritably waved away the apothecary. With a grunt he turned on his side. "Five-thousand-pounds weight of silver, my son, which you can get from my treasury when I'm dead."

Henry swallowed noisily. "A splendid gift, sire. But what shall I do with silver if I've neither lands nor a home?"

"You can keep your soul in patience," said the King. "You're by twelve years the youngest and your time will come."

Again the eyes of the brothers met. Your time will come, Henry, thought William; but take care how you step, or your time will come too soon. My time will come, thought Henry, staring, when I am old and feeble; but strong men can take time by the hand.

He was off again, the tired old man, ordering that money and jewellery should be given to his half-dozen daughters, directing that this burnt abbey should be rebuilt, that church or monastery more richly endowed. He'd always been generous to God, since God had been generous to him. The monk at his side scratched it all down as he spoke. In the back of the room now were groups who clustered and whispered, having heard what they wanted to hear. It was hot in the room. It was going to be a hot day, and the flies were already troublesome. From somewhere outside came the flat musical echo of a goat bell.

At last it was over, and clergy and laity trooped out into the September sun. The two brothers walked together down the cloisters, their heavy spurred boots clinking on the ancient stone. They might not have been full brothers for they were unalike—children of the King's different moods, of his different lives, separated widely in time and circumstances: the

tall handsome purposeful boy and the squat rufous-faced cynical seasoned veteran. They might have found common ground in the unfair benefits given to Robert if the bigger issue had not divided them for ever.

So they came to the gates of the monastery unspeaking, and spurred off in opposite directions without a backward glance —William to take his kingdom and shut up again the men his father had just set free, Henry to weigh out his silver pound by pound.

The King had waited for them to come back; he had thought any minute they would be back; and it was the fall of night before he realised he must die alone. For he dies more lonely who is a king with all his servants and courtiers than a beggar with a son beside him.

All that night, though they thought him asleep, his mind was active and alert, turning this way and that—like a cat in a cage sensing it will soon be dropped in the river. Sometimes he thought of his life and was content. He'd seen much, done much, come far. Coming so young to the high estate seized by his wicked and fratricidal father, he'd shown what he was made of, his ruthless ability and military genius, right from the beginning. Whatever he had taken he held, and if there was opposition or revolt he met it with the sword. Where he ruled, the law—his law—prevailed. He'd been a good father —domineering, perhaps, for you couldn't get out of the way of ruling; he'd been a faithful and a loving husband and that was something with all those smooth-skinned pale-haired English women about; and, when the itch for revenge did not clash with his piety, he'd been a religious and a temperate man.

All things to stand with him at the Judgment Seat: he'd much to be thankful for. But now and then in the darkness old scenes, old faces, floated through the night. The lying, the broken promises, the bad faith, the cruelties and the massacres; these would be with him, too. In particular he thought of the slaughter following the Northumbrian affair. They'd deserved revenge and he'd planned revenge; that Christmas Day eighteen years ago he'd sat in York and planned it all. Perhaps it wasn't the right day for thinking such thoughts, but his mind then, full of its own vigour, had worked in its own way. You did what you pleased and built an abbey or said a *Te Deum* afterwards. So he'd sent out his troops to butcher every man, woman, child and beast for sixty miles round, and so well had they done it that even now after all

this time the country was desolate and waste and barren, a dead land uninhabited by man.

Just after that, he remembered, he'd taken that nightmare march across the Pennines to Chester, and the winter and the countryside seemed against him. He'd chosen to walk with his tired and grumbling men, leading them back out of blind gulches hidden in deep snow, across gale-swept moorlands and through semi-frozen streams, cheering them and encouraging them while all the time inside him his anger grew again, demanding new appeasement.

Generalship, numbers or luck, he'd always been on the winning side wherever he'd been, crossing the broken bridge just before it collapsed, beaten only once in personal fight and then, rolling in the dust, finding his life spared because Robert Short Legs recognised the voice of his father.

Well, it was all over now. Tonight for the last time the ghostly battles could be re-fought, the pitched battles and sieges grey in the morning mist. The tramp of marching men, long lost, long forgotten except by their leader who lay now in the dark, stirring the ashes of his memory for the last faint glow...

There was a light drizzle next morning and day was late. More than usual had stayed with him through the night because some had caught him in the right mood last evening and wheedled concessions out of him, and hope was a powerful spur to devotion in the others.

But as light grew they put out the guttering torches and Hugh, Bishop of St. Albans, opened the lattice window a few inches to let in the smell of the boxwood and the warm damp earth. A few birds cheeped and chattered in the herb garden. Then the monastery bell began to ring.

The King stirred and opened his eyes as from a deep sleep, and at once the watchers moved and yawned and stretched and gathered round, and the dozing servants were shaken or kicked. Montfort, the physician, took up a spoon and stirred the broth on the fire.

The King said: "What's that bell?"

"The monastery bell ringing for primes, sire."

"What day is it?" he asked.

"The ninth of September, sire."

He closed his eyes. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, receive my soul."

They waited for more, dutifully, unexcitedly, knowing his long habit of praying to begin the day. But he didn't speak,

only lay there, apparently considering his words. Montfort came forward with the broth and held it ready, close by. So it was he who first saw the change. He stared and put down the broth. Then he leaned and looked at the King, looked hard with puckered brows and tightened lips, then he slowly straightened up and crossed himself.

"The King is dead."

The light was growing, a grey ashy autumn light, not the warm butter-yellow sunshine of yesterday. No-one spoke. They were so used to the iron authority that they couldn't believe it gone, and waited for a harsh contradiction from the great figure on the bed. But they looked uneasily, sidelong, doubting, and saw that somehow the great figure had shrunken.

It was a shock to them all. They'd been expecting something, but not this sudden leaving, this desertion, this abdication of power.

They didn't know how to meet it.

The hush was broken by Peter the monk who began to mutter his prayers in a harsh voice, and one by one, almost shamefaced, the others joined in. But already something was spreading among them, a slow contagion of alarm. It was not death they disliked so much as the consequences of death —this death. Only a few had legacies to gather like William and Henry, but all had property to hold and protect. Until five minutes ago it had been safe, sheltered by the unseen ramparts of the King's law. Now, in a few seconds, there was no law; it had flickered out in the wind. No-one knew it yet; no-one except the men about the bed.

Bishop Hugh, seeing Sir Henry de Tyes slip out on the heels of two others, thought of his own properties, warm and comfortable and fat and unguarded, and sidled round, still praying, nearer and nearer to the door. Montfort, about to compose and lay out the body, turned his narrow head to see several men pushing a noisy way out. What of my house in Rouen and Godric at the spinning wheel and the cattle and the horses?

It was as if they had found the marks of plague on his body, as if the purple blotches had come suddenly to his face and hands; split, one split in the collective mind and the white milk of reason, of restraint, is gone. Fear became panic and the flight a rout. They fled from his body, from the room, the abbey, this way and that, to tell their friends, to wake their relations, to shout the news in the camp outside as they galloped home.

Except for the servants, two monks only were left, one fat

and plethoric, the other with nervous veined hands and thin-skinned tonsured head. They stared at each other across the body. They stared and lifted their heads and listened. Then, without a signal, they stopped their prayers and turned and gathered up their cloaks and fled.

There were five of the servants in the room with the body of their master. They had watched in silence and now waited in uneasy silence for the priests or the doctors to come back. Some, surely, would think better of their flight? Five minutes, ten minutes . . .

John Ozbern was the King's personal armourer, he'd fought and campaigned beside him ever since Gerberoy, a lean scarred man, with a face so dark that it seemed permanently in shadow. He uncrossed his legs and moved away from the wall where he'd been propping himself; he moved across the room; he stared down at the silent man on the bed. He wasn't awed by death; he'd seen too much of it; it was the only certain thing in life; why treat it with respect?

"Be he really gone?" A young tall sandy-haired man had come up behind him.

"Dead as meat," said Ozbern. "Dead as his father and my father and all the rest of 'em. Dead as dust. Dead as rock. See, he can't hurt you now." He lifted one of the King's hands and the young man took a step back in fright. Ozbern examined the hand of his master, then pulled two splendid rings off the fingers and slipped them into his jerkin.

"Here," said the young man, who had not been too frightened to see this. "That be not yours by no right. Put 'em back."

"They're mine by the same right as they were his," said Ozbern. "Where d'you think he got 'em? D'you think they growed on his fingers like warts?"

They were all there now, all five of them, hesitant, frightened, but greedy. To rob the body of the King; that meant death, and thankful if it was quick. But who was to see? Who was to tell? Not the King.

"And these. And these." Ozbern jerked a jewelled crucifix from round the dead man's neck and pulled a fine diamond off the other hand. "If you've the fancy you would like 'em instead of me, just see if you can take 'em."

They glanced sidelong at Ozbern, at each other, at the door, at the silent figure on the bed. Someone made a half move and the last rampart gave way. One snatched a leather belt with coins in, another a fine doublet and a gold dagger. Two

together seized a silver cup and quarrelled over it, dropping it on the floor and rushing to snatch it again.

The tall young man, late on the move, found the best taken and clutched at the purple silk coverlet of the bed. While he was rolling this into a bundle two soldiers, brought by the noise, looked in. There was a moment's pause as they entered, and Ozbern drew his dagger. But they, too, stared at the corpse and found their allegiance gone. One moved through the servants up to the bed and, after a second glance at the King, pulled the rich cloak from under his shoulders. The other, snatching at the sheets, tumbled the body on to the floor where it lay in sprawling protest among the rushes and the trampling feet. The servants seized the last of the plate, quarrelling over the linen and the robes.

But they didn't waste time, knowing that some law, if not this man's law, might return. One by one they pushed their way out and, when there was no more to take, the last tramping foot echoed away down the stone corridor outside and the King was alone.

Hours passed and the rain stopped and a watery sun broke through, falling through the lattice upon an outstretched hand. The broth, Montfort's broth, bubbled on the fire and as the fire died its bubbling died, while in neighbouring Rouen Montfort guarded his house and his mistress and his horses and his cattle from the rioting mobs that paraded the streets. There was no reason or sense in it, but the hand, the lawmaker's hand, was gone. All men, as the news came, barred their doors and hid their money and saw to their swords and knives.

In the abbey bee-garden the bees were on the move; the sun had warmed them to a lethargic honey-laden activity; they droned in and out of the late flowers and bumped lazily against the lattice panes of the silent room. Tierce bell sounded, and at last a soft footstep came down the passage and halted at the open door. It was the monk with the thin veined hands. He peered nervously into the room and at first thought the King's body had gone. Then he took another step and saw it lying half-naked on the floor of the ransacked room. He turned on his heel and fled.

But this time he came back with others following him, and then someone found William the archbishop praying in his cell, and William came and told them to lift the body back on the bed, to compose the limbs decently and bring fresh linen. Then they formed a silent shame-faced procession and

carried the body into the chapel before the high altar and began masses at once for his soul.

They'd bury him at St. Stephen's, they decided, the abbey he'd founded himself; it seemed suitable and right; it was sixty-odd miles, but they could make up a sizable procession. It would cost money, but someone would pay; the King had relatives, three sons, daughters, cousins, old friends. Some sort of show was only fitting for so great a man. The sons were not here, true enough, not even Robert who must come soon to claim his inheritance, not even Henry who had disappeared somewhere with his retinue, five thousand pounds of silver and all. The cousins? No, they had vanished. And the bodyguard? And the servants? They couldn't be found. Even gold plate belonging to the monastery had gone.

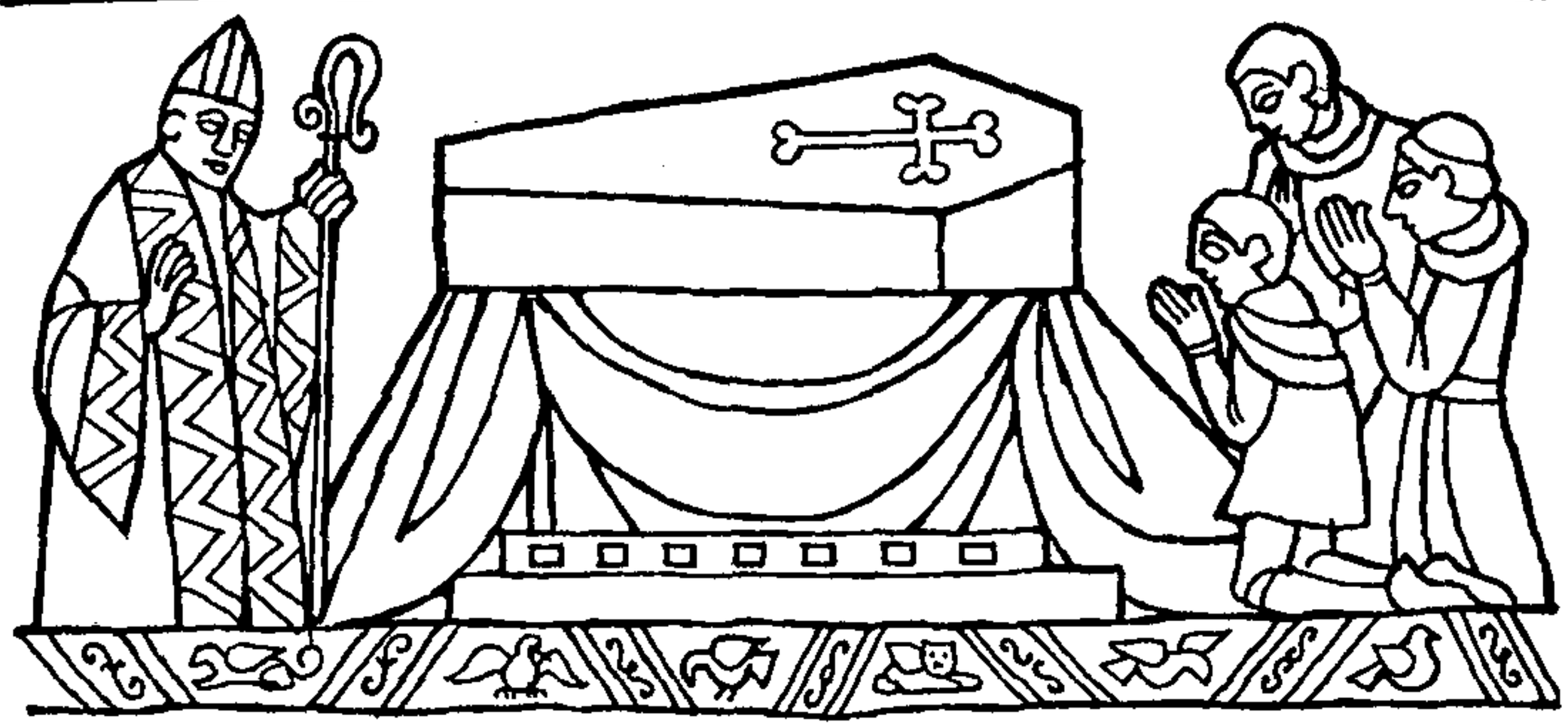
Fortunately, just at the last, a man called Herlouin turned up. He had a small estate nearby and a good reputation. He didn't know the King well, but he seemed willing to organise the thing and pay out what was needed.

The monks said they were glad of his help. In the meantime they sent some of their number to inquire for the King's relatives, but no-one came, and three days after his death the King made his last journey with strangers at his side.

They were expecting him at the town and had prepared. A procession with the Lord Abbot at its head met him outside the walls and turned and led the way in. Townspeople lined the streets and mixed with the monks and clergy who followed the bier. They stood and watched him pass and thought: Well, he's come for the last time; it's right that he should lie here where his wife is; he had his faults but there were worse; if they'd murdered him as they tried, as they murdered three of his guardians when he was still a boy, the others would have been much worse; and the old ones shook their heads and thought of Robert his father, Robert the Devil they called him, who'd been much worse, and the years of banditry that followed before this one put it all down; this one at least had been more like one of them; his mother's father had been a tanner, the peasant streak was strong in him; he was a great man.

There is always something about a funeral.

So they crowded into the abbey church, and stood and knelt dumbly and many wept, though they couldn't have told exactly what they were weeping for except, vaguely, for the mortality of all men. After the mass the Bishop of Evreux preached a moving sermon, while more people than ever



crowded into the church and crushed about the bier and some thought they would suffocate.

"Oh, my children," said the bishop, "here lies your duke and your king. A great and a good man. A nobleman with all the knightly virtues of chivalry. A prince of Christendom. But in this present life no man can live without sin, no, whether he is king or commoner; so I ask you for the love of Christ that you intercede with God Almighty on behalf of our deceased prince; and, as you hope for your own forgiveness, that you forgive him if in anything he has offended against you."

They thought that was the end, and crossed themselves and bowed to take the blessing. But someone else began talking, close beside the bishop, and they looked up to see a tall haggard man standing between the bishop and the bier. He was speaking in a clear shrill voice.

"This place," he said, "this place where you propose to lay this man was once the yard belonging to my father's house. Over there," he pointed, "were the stables, and here was the walled garden where, as a boy, I used to play. That man you pray for seized all this land, without any excuse in law, because he was all-powerful and no-one could question him. But now he's gone I publicly lay claim to the land that was stolen from me, and in God's name I forbid that his body, the body of the spoiler and thief, should be laid to rest in the ground he stole."

They waited with open mouths, gaping and pushing and staring. No-one knew what to expect, and if the King's kinsmen had been there the man would have been seized and

disposed of. But only churchmen were present, and the tall man was untouched. He stood there, an obstruction to all the dignity of the ceremony, a grim uncompromising bar to the last solemn obsequies; he must be dealt with somehow, by reason or by violence.

The bishop said in a quiet voice: "Is this man speaking the truth?"

A priest standing by the bier turned and said: "He is Ascelin, son of Arthur, my Lord. The King despoiled him. I know that to be true. It was his land the King gave to found this Abbey of St. Stephen."

The Lord Abbot had come up beside the bishop and they whispered together. The Lord Abbot was furious, the white, ascetic face flushed and blotchy; this man had committed sacrilege by his interference in a holy place.

The bishop said: "You are Ascelin, son of Arthur, whose land this was?"

"Whose land this is, my lord, for it was unlawfully taken from me."

"You would claim this soil which has been consecrated and given to God?"

"God is the defender of right and cannot surely condone injustice."

The abbot was about to make an angry reply, but the bishop put a hand on his arm.

"Supposing your case to be a good one, my son, you'll agree that we cannot tear down this church and restore your home and your garden. What then would you have us do?"

"At least turn this man out. Scatter his bones where you please, but don't bury him here."

"You see the grave," said the bishop. "It's dug and the coffin is waiting to be lowered, the corpse blessed and embalmed. It is late to turn back now. Let us buy from you the seven feet of earth in which this man shall rest. Then justice will be done and he can lie in peace."

For the first time the tall haggard man hesitated. A glint came into his eye. "What do you offer me for it?"

The bishop turned to the man at his side.

"Forty shillings," snapped the Lord Abbot.

"It's worth eighty," said the thin man.

The abbot glanced angrily at the gaping mob.

"Fifty shillings and have done with it."

"It's worth eighty," repeated Ascelin. "Land changed hands near here not a month since. Apart from the value of

the house and stables. I will take seventy as a concession."

The priests whispered together again. The Lord Abbot was now for violence.

The bishop said: "The abbot will pay you sixty shillings for the grave. It is not an unreasonable price. Come, my son, I think that is fair."

"And for the rest? I'll take sixty shillings now if the rest is compensated for at the same price."

"How much of this have you fair claim to?"

"About half."

"For the rest proportionately then," said the bishop, taking it on himself. "Go with this monk and he will give you the first payment at once."

"You agree to that, my Lord?" said Ascelin to the abbot.

"I agree to that!"

"Very well. It has been agreed before all these people. Be it so." Ascelin turned and followed the monk.

When his tall bony head and shoulders had disappeared at the chancel door, Bishop Gilbert made a hasty sign to the Lord Abbot and they resumed the service.

But the emotional temperature had fallen, and in so falling the reverence and the sorrow had slipped away. Men stirred and murmured together. The close confinement, the heat, the smell, were too much, and many were already pushing out of the church into the street where they could talk and argue in greater ease.

The bishop lifted up his fine voice. "Oh, Almighty God, we beseech thee to receive the body and soul of this thy faithful servant, William, sixth Duke of Normandy, first Norman King of England. Grant him rest, mercy at the Throne of Judgment and the eternal glory of salvation through the intercession of Christ thine only son. Amen."

As the coffin was lowered into its grave the great bell began to toll. It disturbed the pigeons in the tower and they rose in a flock, like handfuls of paper thrown with the wind, fluttering noisily into the hazy sky above the town and above the thick congealed smoke of the burning houses, above the thin snake of the river and the flat rich Norman plains. They turned in a great circle against the land and the sky. Far in the north the sea glinted and glimmered in the afternoon sun.

As the bell finished tolling, the last of the people streamed out of the church and the pigeons began to settle into the tower again.

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AN ABYSSINIAN AFFAIR

BY DARRELL BATES

THEY rang up Brigade Headquarters from the Imperial Hotel one night at about one o'clock, to say that a major was running about the foyer naked, screaming and covered with blood. Even for Addis Ababa in 1941 this was a bit unusual, so I said All right, and drove down in a staff car to see what I could do to help.

I liked Addis Ababa. It was good in the daytime but it was better at night. The eucalyptus trees seemed taller; in the headlights of the car they looked, if one drove fast enough, like plane trees in the Bois de Boulogne. The streets looked broader without the crowds, and the few people that were still about, with their dark cloaks and white shifts drawn tight against the cold, had a mediaeval air as if they were bent on archaic practices and fourteenth-century sins. There is something attenuated about Addis at the best of times, and in those early days between the end of Italian rule and the return of the Emperor Haile Selassie it was quite unreal. Perhaps it was something to do with the altitude—Addis Ababa is about eight thousand feet up.

The manager of the hotel, who was a Greek named George, was waiting for me.

"Where is he?" I asked.

The hotel looked and sounded very normal to me. The potted palms were drooping with sleep and a tired gramophone with an enormous horn was still playing *O Sole Mio* to the

usual unlistening audience of khaki shorts and crumpled green and yellow frocks. There were one or two people lying on the floor, but they all had something on and, as far as I could see, none of them was a major.

"He is in my office," said George.

The major was sitting quietly on a cane chair when I went in, and someone had lent him a towel.

"Are you all right?" I said. I didn't quite know how to start.

"Yes, I'm all right now." Even in a towel, he looked like a real-estate agent who was trying to pass as a Regular, and had succeeded.

There wasn't really very much wrong with him. He had a few scratches on his face and arms. We put some iodine on them and asked him where his clothes were.

"Upstairs," he said, pointing to the ceiling, "but I'm not bloody well going up there again."

"All right," I said. I thought I had better humour him a bit. I borrowed a pair of trousers and a shirt from the manager, who, I knew, always had a large selection of such things in his office. Guests at the Imperial Hotel seemed to leave their clothes behind fairly often.

"Come and have a drink and tell me what happened."

The major kept looking over his shoulder. I gave him a beer and after a bit he started to relax.

Just when I thought I had got the right mixture of blood back into his alcohol stream to make him talkative, a couple of girls came into the room. One was fat and her red frock fitted her like the skin of a Bologna sausage. The other was thin and sinuous and edible like spaghetti à la Milanaise. They sat at a table by the window.

The major sat up in his chair and touched his moustache. "You know the lingo," he said. "Ask them to come over here."

"Haven't you had enough of strange girls for one night?" I suggested, hazarding a guess at the cause of his trouble.

He looked at me curiously, as if through a pane of glass. I felt like a sea-horse in an aquarium.

"You don't understand. After what happened I daren't sleep alone."

"You tell me what happened," I said, "and then I'll go and talk to them."

"But they may go . . ."

I didn't think they would, but I said I'd see what I could do.

When I returned from the other table I found he had ordered some more beer. I realised that I had to strike quickly while the iron was still more or less cold.

"Come on now. Tell me what happened."

"All right," he said suddenly, "I'll tell you.

"A week or so ago I fell off a wall. By mistake, of course. No bones broken or anything like that, but I felt a shade muzzy afterwards. The M.O. told me to take a few days' leave. So I came up here. This evening I was drinking with a few chaps. After a time I felt a bit funny. It was the altitude, of course. I've come up from the coast. It's very flat down there." He sipped his beer and took a deep breath. "So I went up to my room for a lie-down.

"When I opened my eyes," he went on, "I saw there was someone sitting at the window of the house just opposite my room. It was a girl, and she was brushing her long black hair. When she saw me looking at her she said 'Hello, Captain.'"

He coughed slightly. "I'm a major actually, but I suppose she wasn't to know. Well, we chatted for a bit and then she said, 'Shall I come to your room, Captain?' So I said, 'Jolly good.' In no time at all there she was sitting on my bed. I stroked her and she purred, just like a..." His voice tailed away.

"Well," he coughed again, "later on I must have gone to sleep. When I woke up I could feel there was something warm and breathing in the bed. At first I couldn't think what it was, but then I remembered, and I gave her a friendly pat on the back. Imagine my horror when I found it was covered with fur!" He put his hands over his eyes for a moment. "Do you know what it was, old boy? It was a bloody cat.

"I don't know what happened after that. I really can't remember anything much until I found myself covered in scratches and blood in the office over there. Soon afterwards, you arrived."

I thought I knew from the smell of his breath what the trouble was, though I couldn't quite think how he had got all those scratches. I signalled to the girls and they came over.

I had got my story and I wanted to go home.

"Which one do you want?" I asked him. I thought I had better get him settled before I left.

"What about you, old boy?" he asked politely. When I hesitated, he added, "Have this one on me." I had paid for the drinks.

"I don't want either," I said ungraciously. "I'm going to bed."

"Oh, good!" he said. "Then I can take both of them."

"Both?"

"Of course. Safety in numbers, old boy. They can't both turn into cats. Not this one, anyway." He patted the thin, spaghetti-like girl, but when she responded by arching her back like an unfed kitten he stopped quickly and took his arm away.

I was quite sure now that it was time I went to bed. Before I left, however, I asked George to show me the room upstairs. There were the major's clothes on the floor in various parts of the room. There was a half-empty bottle of Australian whisky on the table. The window was open, and the light was on.

I went across to the window. There was a house opposite and a window, but it was shut and there was no light in it. In any case it was about ten feet away and there was a drop of another thirty feet down into the yard below.

I shut the window, packed the major's things into his suitcase, turned off the light and went downstairs. I gave the suitcase to George and asked him, out of curiosity, who lived in the house next door.

"Oh, some Greek. A bad Greek from Salonica. Not a good Greek like George."

"Has he got a family?"

"Oh yes, lotta family. His wife, she is..." he paused delicately, "she is une Addis Ababaienne. Lotta kids." He made a graceful, descending sweep of his hand. "Some boys. Some girls. Some crazy."

"Have any of them got long black hair?"

"All of them got black hair. Some long, some curly. One girl got more long hair than anybody. She very crazy." He tapped his head with his forefinger.

I thanked him and said it was time I went home.

"A little drink before you go, Captain?" he pleaded with his spaniel eyes. I didn't want another drink, but in the end I said, yes, I would have a very small one just to please him. One way and another he must have had a rather difficult evening.

While we were sipping ouzo we heard the sound of bare running feet outside. A moment later the glass door at the back of the office swung open with a rush of air and a girl swept in, her eyes flashing and the words already pouring out

of her mouth. It was, inevitably, one of the major's girls. The fat one. I wished I had been firmer about George's final drink and gone to bed.

The torrent of words went on for some time, but the stream was too fast-flowing for me to catch even the drift of it. When at last she paused for breath I asked George what the trouble was.

"The major wants something, I think..." he said, but he didn't sound very certain about it.

"What?" I asked. "What on earth can he want now?"

"I will ask her," George said. It seemed incredible that, in all that time and all those words, what the major wanted hadn't yet emerged.

In the end George turned away from the girl and looked at me. The tears had started coming into his eyes.

"He wants a dog. The major wants a dog in his room. 'Just to make sure,' he says."

"George," I said firmly, "I'm going to bed."

He came with me to the entrance of the hotel and we said goodnight.

As it happened, I had parked my car outside the house which belonged to the bad Greek from Salonica. I looked up at it for a moment. The windows were dark and empty and silent. It was clear that, like sensible people, they had all gone to bed. I got into my car and drove away.

I was more than halfway home when I heard a movement in the back of the car. It wasn't very long since the fighting had stopped and Addis Ababa was still an unsettled, restless place. We had been told not to go out at night unarmed. I braked as hard as I could, pushed down the door handle and had rolled out on to the road before the car had stopped. I had my revolver in one hand. With the other I pulled open the rear door.

From inside came a female voice. "Hello, Captain," it said.

When I looked in the back I saw that she had green eyes and lots and lots and lots of long black hair.

I was still running when, less than a hundred yards from the mess, the brigadier's car passed me and then suddenly pulled up. He had, I knew, been out playing bridge somewhere. He leaned out of the window. "What the hell are you doing, running about like a scalded cat at this hour of the night?"

I slowed down to a walk. I wondered for a moment if I was covered in scratches, too. When I got back I locked my room, looked in the mirror and found that I was all right.

Early next morning I woke up the staff sergeant and went out quietly to collect the car. He was an understanding man and he didn't ask any questions.

To my surprise the car was still there. Someone, however, had removed all four wheels, and when we looked inside the bonnet we found the engine had been removed as well...

Soon afterwards I was transferred without any noticeable promotion to Nairobi, where girls were girls, they said, and cats were cats, and you could still leave a car unattended in the street.

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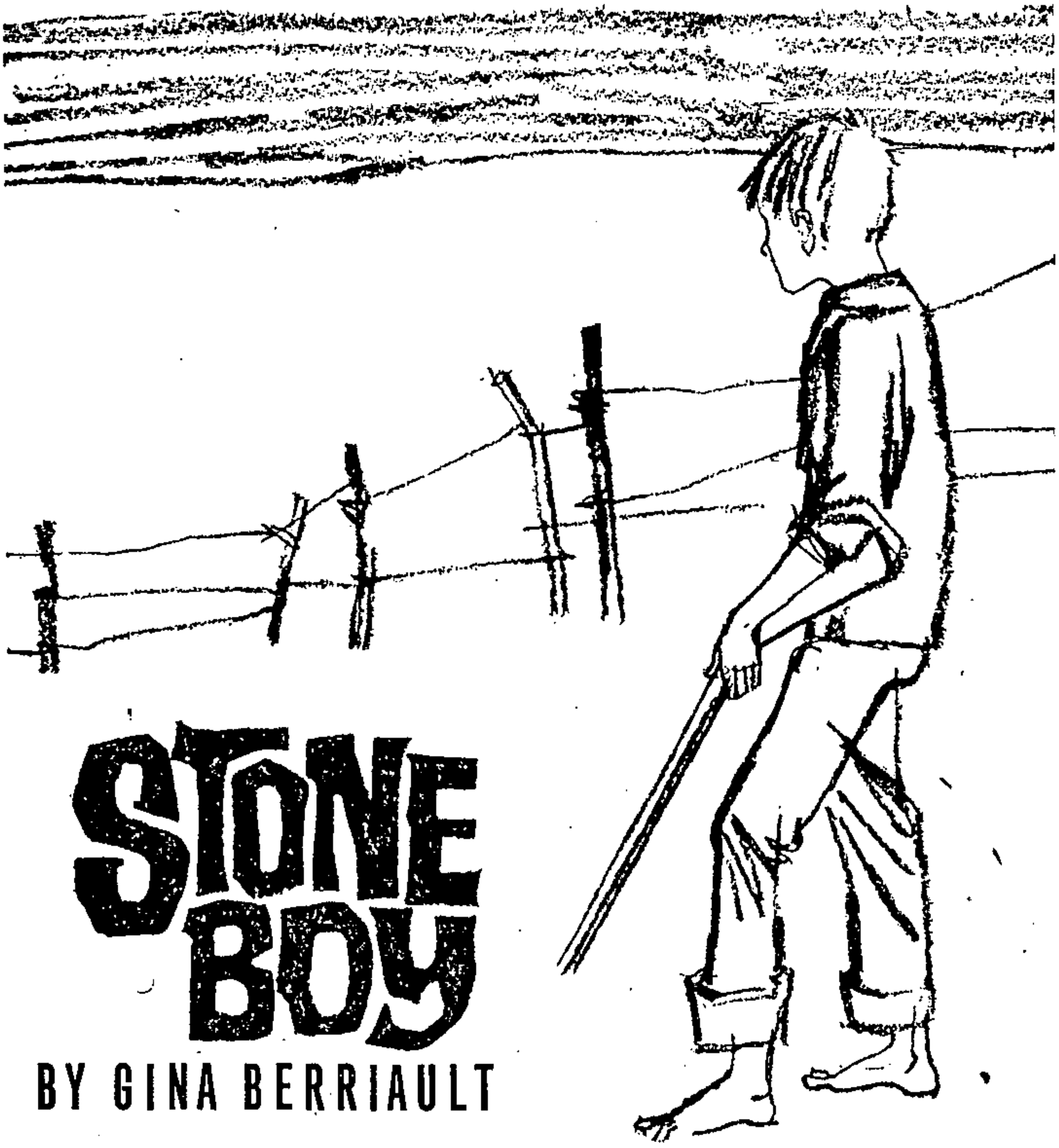
FELINES

Look at the gentle, savage, monstrous gentleman,
With jungles in his heart, yet metropolitan
As we shall never be...
He ponders ancient mysteries on the windowsill,
Now stretches, bares his claws and saunters off to find
The thrills of love and hunting, cunningly combined.
Acrobat, diplomat, and simple tabby-cat,
He conjures tangled forests in a furnished flat.

MICHAEL HAMBURGER, *London Tom-Cat*

I was in the top room alone when there was a noise at the door as if it were being kicked by a soft boot. I opened it and Monty came scampering in. He rushed to the sofa, climbed up the back and walked along it, then down again to the floor and across to where I was standing, arching his back, rubbing his head against my leg and purring. I bent down and stroked him, whereupon he exercised a manœuvre which was aimed to be especially endearing. He twisted his head, collapsed on the floor and turned over, lying with his back on the green carpet, paws in the air, displaying his silky, maize underparts while a pair of bright yellow eyes hopefully watched for the pleasure the sight would give me.

DEREK TANGYE, *A Cat in the Window*



STONE BOY

BY GINA BERRIAULT

ARNOLD drew his overalls and ravelling grey sweater over his naked body. In the other narrow bed his brother Eugene went on sleeping, undisturbed by the alarm clock's rusty ring. Arnold, watching his brother sleeping, felt a peculiar dismay; he was nine, six years younger than Eugie, and in their waking hours it was he who was subordinate. To dispel emphatically his uneasy advantage over his sleeping brother, he threw himself on the hump of Eugie's body.

"Get up! Get up!" he cried.

Arnold felt his brother twist away and saw the blankets lifted in a great wing and, all in an instant, he was lying on his back under the covers with only his face showing, like a baby, and Eugie was sprawled on top of him.

"Whassa matter with you?" asked Eugie in sleepy anger, his face hanging close.

"Get up," Arnold repeated. "You said you'd pick peas with me."

Stupidly, Eugie gazed around the room to see if morning had come into it yet. Arnold began to laugh derisively, making soft, snorting noises, and was thrown off the bed. He got up from the floor and went down the stairs, the laughter continuing, like hiccups, against his will. But when he opened the staircase door and entered the parlour he hunched up his shoulders and was quiet because his parents slept in the bedroom downstairs.

Arnold lifted his .22-calibre rifle from the rack on the kitchen wall. It was an old lever-action that his father had given him because nobody else used it any more. On their way down to the garden he and Eugie would go by the lake, and if there were any ducks on it he'd take a shot at them. Standing on the stool in front of the cupboard, he searched on the top shelf in the confusion of medicines and ointments for man and beast and found a small yellow box of .22 cartridges. Then he sat down on the stool and began to load his gun.

It was cold in the kitchen so early, but later in the day, when his mother canned the peas, the heat from the wood stove would be almost unbearable. Yesterday she had finished preserving the huckleberries that the family had picked up the mountain, and before that she had canned all the cherries his father had brought from the warehouse in Corinth. Sometimes, on these summer days, Arnold would deliberately come out from the shade where he was playing and make himself as uncomfortable as his mother was in the kitchen, by standing in the sun until the sweat ran down his body.

Eugie came clumping down the stairs and into the kitchen, his head drooping with sleepiness. From his perch on the stool Arnold watched Eugie slip on his green knitted cap. Eugie didn't really need a cap; he hadn't had a haircut for a long time and his brown curls grew thick and matted, close around his ears and down his neck, tapering there to a small whorl. Eugie passed his left hand through his hair before he set his cap down with his right. The very way he slipped his cap on was an announcement of his status; almost everything he did was a reminder that he was eldest—first he, then Nora, then Arnold—and called attention to how tall he was—almost as tall as his father—how long his legs were, how small he was in the hips, and what a neat dip above his buttocks his thick-soled logger's boots gave him. Arnold never tired of watching Eugie offer silent praise unto himself. He wondered,

as he sat enthralled, if when he got to be Eugie's age he would still be undersized and his hair still straight.

Eugie eyed the gun. "Don't you know this ain't duck season?" he asked gruffly, as if he were the sheriff.

"No, I don't know," Arnold said with a snigger.

Eugie picked up the tin washtub for the peas, unbolted the door with his free hand and kicked it open. Then, lifting the tub to his head, he went clumping down the back steps. Arnold followed, closing the door behind him.

The sky was faintly grey, almost white. The mountains behind the farm made the sun climb a long way to show itself. Several miles to the south, where the range opened up, hung an orange mist, but the valley in which the farm lay was still cold and colourless.

Eugie opened the gate to the yard and the boys passed between the barn and the row of chicken houses, their feet stirring up the carpet of brown feathers dropped by the moulting chickens. They paused before going down the slope to the lake. A fluky morning wind ran among the shocks of wheat that covered the slope. It sent a shimmer northwards across the lake, gently moving the rushes that formed an island in the centre. Killdeer, their white markings flashing, skimmed the water, crying their shrill, sweet cry. And there at the south end of the lake were four wild ducks, swimming out from the willows into open water.

Arnold followed Eugie down the slope, stealing, as his brother did, from one shock of wheat to another. Eugie paused before climbing through the wire fence that divided the wheat field from the marshy pasture around the lake. They were screened from the ducks by the willows along the lake's edge.

"If you hit your duck, you want me to go in after it?" Eugie said.

"If you want," Arnold said.

Eugie lowered his eyelids, leaving slits of mocking blue. "You'd drown 'fore you got to it, them legs of yours are so puny," he said.

He shoved the tub under the fence and, pressing down the centre wire, climbed through into the pasture.

Arnold pressed down the bottom wire, thrust a leg through and leaned forward to bring the other leg after. His rifle caught on the wire and he jerked at it. The air was rocked by the sound of the shot. Feeling foolish, he lifted his face, baring it to an expected shower of derision from his brother.

But Eugie did not turn around. Instead, from his crouching position, he fell to his knees and then pitched forward on to his face. The ducks rose up crying from the lake, cleared the mountain and beat away northwards across the pale sky.

Arnold squatted beside his brother. Eugie seemed to be climbing the earth, as if the earth ran up and down, and when he found he couldn't scale it he lay still. "Eugie?"

Then Arnold saw it, under the tendril of hair at the nape of the neck—a slow rising of bright blood. It had an obnoxious movement, like that of a parasite.

"Hey, Eugie," he said again. He was feeling the same discomfort he had felt when he had watched Eugie sleeping; his brother didn't know that he was lying face down in the pasture.

Again he said, "Hey, Eugie," an anxious nudge in his voice. But Eugie was as still as the morning around them.

Arnold set his rifle on the ground and stood up. He picked up the tub and, dragging it behind him, walked along by the willows to the garden fence and climbed through. He went down on his knees among the tangled vines. The pods were cold with the night, but his hands were strange to him, and not until some time had passed did he realise that the pods were numbing his fingers. He picked from the top of the vine first, then lifted the vine to look underneath for pods, and moved on to the next.

It was a warmth on his back, like a large hand laid firmly there, that made him raise his head. Way up the slope the grey farmhouse was struck by the sun. While his head had been bent the land had grown bright around him.

When he got up his legs were so stiff that he had to go down on his knees again to ease the pain. Then, walking sideways, he dragged the tub, half full of peas, up the slope...

The kitchen was warm now; a fire was roaring in the stove with a closed-up, rushing sound. His mother was spooning eggs from a pot of boiling water and putting them into a bowl. Her short brown hair was uncombed and fell forward across her eyes as she bent her head. Nora was lifting a frying-pan full of trout from the stove, holding the handle with a tea-towel. His father had just come in after bringing the cows from the north pasture to the barn, and was sitting on the stool, unbuttoning his red plaid mackinaw.

"Did you boys fill the tub?" his mother asked.

"They ought of by now," his father said. "They went out of the house an hour ago. Eugie woke me up comin' downstairs. I heard you shootin'—did you get a duck?"

"No," Arnold said. They would want to know why Eugie wasn't coming in for breakfast, he thought. "Eugie's dead," he told them.

They stared at him. The pitch crackled in the stove.

"You kids playin' a joke?" his father asked.

"Where's Eugene?" his mother asked scoldingly. She wanted, Arnold knew, to see his eyes, and when he had glanced at her she put the bowl and spoon down on the stove and walked past him. His father stood up and went out of the door after her. Nora followed them with little skipping steps, as if afraid to be left alone.

Arnold went into the barn, down along the foddering passage past the cows waiting to be milked, and climbed into the loft. After a few minutes he heard a terrifying sound coming towards the house. His parents and Nora were returning from the willows, and sounds sharp as knives were rising from his mother's breast and carrying over the sloping fields. In a short while he heard his father go down the back steps, slam the car door and drive away.

Arnold lay still as a fugitive, listening to the cows eating close by. If his parents never called him, he thought, he would stay up in the loft for ever, out of the way. In the night he would sneak down for a drink of water from the faucet over the trough and for whatever food they left for him by the barn.

The rattle of his father's car as it turned down the lane recalled him to the present. He heard the voices of his Uncle Andy and Aunt Alice as they and his father went past the barn to the lake. He could feel the morning growing heavier with sun. Someone, probably Nora, had let the chickens out of their coops and they were cackling in the yard.

After a while another car turned down the road off the highway. The car drew to a stop and he heard the voices of strange men. The men also went past the barn and down to the lake. The undertakers, whom his father must have phoned from Uncle Andy's house, had arrived from Corinth. Then he heard everybody come back and heard the car turn around and leave.

"Arnold!" It was his father calling from the yard.

He climbed down the ladder and went out into the sun, picking wisps of hay from his overalls.

Corinth, nine miles away, was the county seat. Arnold sat in the front seat of the old Ford between his father, who was

driving, and Uncle Andy; no-one spoke. Uncle Andy was his mother's brother, and he had been fond of Eugie because Eugie had resembled him. Andy had taken Eugie hunting and had given him a knife and a lot of things, and now Andy, his eyes narrowed, sat tall and stiff beside Arnold.

Arnold's father parked the car before the courthouse. It was a two-storey brick building with a lamp on each side of the bottom step. They went up the wide stone steps, Arnold and his father going first, and entered the darkly-panelled hallway. The shirt-sleeved man in the sheriff's office said that the sheriff was at Carlson's Parlour examining the Curwing boy.

Andy went off to get the sheriff while Arnold and his father waited on a bench in the corridor. Arnold felt his father watching him, and he lifted his eyes with painful casualness to the announcement, on the opposite wall, of the Corinth County Annual Rodeo, and then to the clock with its loudly clucking pendulum. After he had come down from the loft his father and Uncle Andy had stood in the yard with him and asked him to tell them everything, and he had explained to them how the gun had caught on the wire. But when they had asked him why he hadn't run back to the house to tell his parents, he had had no answer—all he could say was that he had gone down into the garden to pick the peas. His father had stared at him in a pale, puzzled way, and it was then that he had felt his father and the others set their cold, turbulent silence against him. Arnold shifted on the bench, his only feeling, a small one of compunction, imposed by his father's eyes.

At a quarter-past nine Andy and the sheriff came in. They all went into the sheriff's private office, and Arnold was sent forward to sit in the chair by the sheriff's desk; his father and Andy sat down on the bench against the wall.

The sheriff lumped down into his swivel chair and swung towards Arnold. He was an old man with white hair like wheat stubble. His restless green eyes made him seem not to be in his office but to be hurrying and bobbing around somewhere else.

"What did you say your name was?" the sheriff asked.

"Arnold," he replied, but he could not remember telling the sheriff his name before.

"Curwing?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing with a .22, Arnold?"

"It's mine," he said.

"Okay. What were you going to shoot?"

"Some ducks," he replied.

"Out of season?"

He nodded.

"That's bad," said the sheriff. "Were you and your brother good friends?"

What did he mean—good friends? Eugie was his brother. That was different from a friend, Arnold thought. A best friend was your own age, but Eugie was almost a man. Eugie had had a way of looking at him, slyly and mockingly and yet confidentially, that had summed up how they both felt about being brothers. Arnold had wanted to be with Eugie more than with anybody else but he couldn't say they had been good friends.

"Did they ever quarrel?" the sheriff asked his father.

"Not that I know," his father replied. "It seemed to me that Arnold cared a lot for Eugie."

"Did you?" the sheriff asked Arnold.

If it seemed so to his father, then it was so. Arnold nodded.

"Were you mad at him this morning?"

"No."

"How did you happen to shoot him?"

"We was crawlin' through the fence."

"Yes?"

"An' the gun got caught on the wire."

"Seems the hammer must of caught," his father put in.

"All right, that's what happened," said the sheriff. "But what I want you to tell me is this. Why didn't you go back to the house and tell your father right away? Why did you go and pick peas for an hour?"

Arnold gazed over his shoulder at his father, expecting his father to have an answer for this also. But his father's eyes, larger and even lighter blue than usual, were fixed upon him curiously. Arnold picked at a callus in his right palm. It seemed odd now that he had not run back to the house and wakened his father, but he could not remember why he had not. They were all waiting for him to answer.

"I come down to pick peas," he said.

"Didn't you think," asked the sheriff, stepping carefully from word to word, "that it was more important for you to go and tell your parents what had happened?"

"The sun was gonna come up," Arnold said.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"It's better to pick peas while they're cool."

The sheriff swung away from him, laid both hands flat on his desk. "Well, all I can say is," he said across to Arnold's father and Uncle Andy, "he's either a moron or he's so reasonable that he's way ahead of us." He gave a challenging snort. "It's come to my notice that the most reasonable guys are mean ones. They don't feel nothing."

For a moment the three men sat still. Then the sheriff lifted his hand like a man taking an oath. "Take him home," he said.

Andy uncrossed his legs. "You don't want him?"

"Not now," replied the sheriff. "Maybe in a few years."

Arnold's father stood up. He held his hat against his chest. "The gun ain't his no more," he said wanly.

Arnold went first through the hallway, hearing behind him the heels of his father and Uncle Andy striking the floorboards. He went down the steps ahead of them and climbed into the back seat of the car. Andy paused as he was getting into the front seat and gazed back at Arnold, and Arnold saw that his uncle's eyes had absorbed the knowingness from the sheriff's eyes. Andy and his father and the sheriff had discovered what made him go down into the garden. It was because he was cruel, the sheriff had said, and didn't care about his brother. Arnold lowered his eyelids meekly against his uncle's stare.

The rest of the day he did his tasks around the farm, keeping apart from the family. At evening, when he saw his father stamp tiredly into the house, Arnold did not put down his hammer and leave the chicken coop he was repairing. He was afraid that they did not want him to eat supper with them. But in a few minutes another fear that they would go to the trouble of calling him and that he would be made conspicuous by his tardiness made him follow his father into the house. As he went through the kitchen he saw the jars of peas standing in rows on the workbench, a reproach to him.

No-one spoke at supper, and his mother, who sat next to him, leaned her head in her hand all through the meal, curving her fingers over her eyes so as not to see him. They were finishing their small, silent supper when the visitors began to arrive, knocking hard on the back door. The men were coming from their farms now that it was growing dark and they could not work any more.

Old Man Matthews, grey and stocky, came first, with his two sons, Orion, the elder, and Clint, who was Eugie's age. As the callers entered the parlour where the family ate, Arnold

sat down in a rocking chair. Even as he had been undecided before supper whether to remain outside or take his place at the table, he now thought that he should go upstairs, and yet he stayed to avoid being conspicuous by his absence. If he stayed, he thought, as he always stayed and listened when visitors came, they would see that he was only Arnold and not the person the sheriff thought he was. He sat with his arms crossed and his hands tucked into his armpits and did not lift his eyes.

The Matthews men had hardly settled down around the table, after Arnold's mother and Nora had cleared away the dishes, when another car rattled down the road and someone else rapped on the back door. This time it was Sullivan, a spare and sandy man, so nimble of gesture and expression that Arnold had never been able to catch more than a few of his meanings. Sullivan, in dusty jeans, sat down in another rocker, shot out his skinny legs and began to talk in his fast way, recalling everything that Eugene had ever said to him. The other men interrupted to tell of occasions they remembered, and after a time Clint's young voice, hoarse like Eugene's had been, broke in to tell about the time Eugene had beat him in a wrestling match.

Out in the kitchen the voices of Orion's wife and of Mrs. Sullivan mingled with Nora's voice but not, Arnold noticed, his mother's. Then dry little Mr. Cram came, leaving large Mrs. Cram in the kitchen, and there was no chair left for Mr. Cram to sit in. No-one asked Arnold to get up and he was unable to rise. He knew that the story had got around to them during the day about how he had gone and picked peas after he had shot his brother, and he knew that although they were talking only about Eugie they were thinking about him and if he got up, if he moved even his foot, they would all be alerted. Then Uncle Andy arrived and leaned his tall, lanky body against the door-jamb and there were two men standing.

Presently Arnold was aware that the talk had stopped. He knew without looking up that the men were watching him.

"Not a tear in his eye," said Andy, and Arnold knew that it was his uncle who had gestured the men to attention.

"He don't give a hoot, is that how it goes?" asked Sullivan, trippingly.

"He's a reasonable fellow," Andy explained. "That's what the sheriff said. It's us who ain't reasonable. If we'd of shot our brother, we'd of come runnin' back to the house, cryin' like a baby. Well, we'd of been unreasonable. What would

of been the use of actin' like that? If your brother is shot dead, he's shot dead. What's the use of gettin' emotional about it? The thing to do is go down to the garden and pick peas. Am I right?"

The men around the room shifted their heavy, satisfying weight of unreasonableness.

Matthews' son Orion said: "If I'd of done what he done, Pa would've hung my pelt by the side of that big coyote's in the barn."

Arnold sat in the rocker until the last man had filed out. While his family was out in the kitchen bidding the callers goodnight and the cars were driving away down the dirt lane to the highway, he picked up one of the kerosene lamps and slipped quickly up the stairs. In his room he undressed by lamplight, although he and Eugie had always undressed in the dark, and not until he was lying in his bed did he blow out the flame. He felt nothing, not any grief. There was only the same immense silence and crawling inside of him; it was the way the house and fields felt under a merciless sun.

He awoke suddenly. He knew that his father was out in the yard, closing the doors of the chicken houses. The sound that had wakened him was the step of his father as he got up from the rocker and went down the back steps. And he knew that his mother was awake in her bed.

Throwing off the covers, he rose swiftly, went down the stairs and across the dark parlour to his parents' room. He rapped on the door.

"Mother?"

From the closed room her voice rose to him, a seeking and retreating voice. "Yes?"

"Mother?" he asked insistently. He had expected her to realise that he wanted to go down on his knees by her bed and tell her that Eugie was dead. She did not know it yet, nobody knew it, and yet she was sitting up in bed, waiting to be told, waiting for him to confirm her dread. He had expected her to tell him to come in, to allow him to dig his head into her blankets and tell her about the terror he had felt when he had knelt beside Eugie. He had come to clasp her in his arms and, in his terror, to pummel her breasts with his head. He put his hand upon the knob.

"Go back to bed, Arnold," she called sharply.

But he waited.

"Go back! Is night when you get afraid?"

At first he did not understand. Then, silently, he left the

door and for a stricken moment stood by the rocker. Outside everything was still. The fences, the shocks of wheat seen through the window before him were so still it was as if they moved and breathed in the daytime and had fallen silent with the lateness of the hour. It was a silence that seemed to observe his father, a figure moving alone around the yard, his lantern casting a circle of light by his feet. In a few minutes his father would enter the dark house, the lantern still lighting his way.

Arnold was suddenly aware that he was naked. He had thrown off his blankets and come down the stairs to tell his mother how he felt about Eugie, but she had refused to listen to him and his nakedness had become unpardonable. At once he went back up the stairs, fleeing from his father's lantern.

At breakfast he kept his eyelids lowered as if to deny the humiliating night. Nora, sitting at his left, did not pass the pitcher of milk to him and he did not ask for it. He would never again, he vowed, ask them for anything, and he ate his fried eggs and potatoes only because everybody ate meals—the cattle ate, and the cats; it was customary for everybody to eat.

"Nora, you gonna keep that pitcher for yourself?" his father asked.

Nora lowered her head unsurely.

"Pass it on to Arnold," his father said.

Nora put her hands in her lap.

His father picked up the metal pitcher and set it down at Arnold's plate.

Arnold, pretending to be deaf to the discord, did not glance up, but relief rained over his shoulders at the thought that his parents recognised him again. They must have lain awake after his father had come in from the yard: had they realised together why he had come down the stairs and knocked at their door?

"Bessie's missin' this morning," his father called out to his mother, who had gone into the kitchen. "She went up the mountain last night and had her calf, most likely. Somebody's got to go up and find her 'fore the coyotes get the calf."

That had been Eugie's job, Arnold thought. Eugie would climb the cattle trails in search of a newborn calf and come down the mountain carrying the calf across his back, with the cow running behind him, mooing in alarm.

Arnold ate the few more forkfuls of his breakfast, put his

hands on the edge of the table and pushed back his chair. If he went for the calf he'd be away from the farm all morning. He could switch the cow down the mountain slowly, and the calf would run along at his mother's side.

When he passed through the kitchen his mother was setting a kettle of water on the stove. "Where you going?" she asked awkwardly.

"Up to get the calf," he replied, averting his face.

"Arnold?"

At the door he paused reluctantly, his back to her, knowing that she was seeking him out, as his father was doing, and he called upon his pride to protect him from them.

"Was you knocking at my door last night?"

He looked over his shoulder at her, his eyes narrow and dry.

"What'd you want?" she asked humbly.

"I didn't want nothing," he said flatly.

Then he went out of the door and down the back steps, his legs trembling from the fright his answer gave him.

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GINA BERRIAULT is an American writer whose stories have been acclaimed by critics for their versatility and unusually fine writing talent. Miss Berriault's stories, besides being widely anthologised, have won many awards, including *The Paris Review* Aga Khan fiction prize and two O. Henry Awards. She has written two novels, *The Descent* and *Conference of Victims*, and a collection of short stories, *The Mistress and Other Stories*, from which *Stone Boy* was taken. A native of California, Gina Berriault lives there now with her daughter.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD
(SEPTEMBER ISSUE)

Across. 8, *Home-made.* 9, *Look on.* 10, *Ado.* 11, *Unvaried.* 12, *Uneasy.* 13, *Personal letters.* 15, *Damsels.* 18, *Storeys.* 21, *Wild-cat strikers.* 24, *Carmel.* 25, *Aphorism.* 26, *Elm.* 27, *Meaner.* 28, *Enrolled.*

Down. 1, ,*Pounce.* 2, *Le Mans.* 3, *National Gallery.* 4, *Readily.* 5, *Gloucestershire.* 6, *Pole Star.* 7, *Go astray.* 14, *Rum.* 16, *Animated.* 17, *Sediment.* 19, *Eye.* 20, *Ashamed.* 22, *Kirtle.* 23, *Rushes.*

From the newly-discovered diary recording the trials and tribulations of a pioneer motorist . . .

BY HUGH TRACEY

FATHER was a country doctor. He loved his fast trap horses which bowled his yellow-wheeled dogcart at breakneck speed through the narrow, high-banked lanes of east Devon on his daily rounds.

He enjoyed the reputation of administering both medicine and rumbustious good fun to all his patients, squire and parson, farmer and clerk, farm labourer and village shopkeeper alike. A visit from this gay, volatile, quicksilver physician and family doctor in his thirties and early forties was an event to be remembered and almost worth the discomfort of requiring his services.

He would dash through the countryside in the style expected of a successful professional man of the day, his green-liveried coachman, a young man who was never addressed except as Gunner, completing the picture by sitting bolt-upright, back to back with the doctor in the dogcart, arms correctly folded, and on his head an immaculate top-hat.

Father lived an idyllic existence made possible, let it be admitted, only by his good fortune in marrying Emily Alice, a devoted wife and heiress to a considerable if moderate fortune, who not only made his every enthusiasm a practical

channel of enjoyment but produced with remarkable regularity their brood of hefty sons and daughters.

It was into this paradise of late Victorian and early Edwardian bliss that the voice of the serpent intruded with promise of progress and speed, and tempted Father in the shape of a 10-12 h.p. Peugeot motor car, twin cylinders, acetylene gas headlamps in shiny brass, leather upholstery, and all propelled by two chains driving over the back axle.

He had seen it on a recent visit to friends in London and the outcome was never in doubt from that moment.

Alice plucked for him the heavenly apple, and the horse-coper, newly turned motor-car salesman, provided the sword which drove them out from the garden of equines into the wilderness of machines. The year was 1907.

One of the minor bits of paraphernalia with which every aspiring motor-car owner had to equip himself was a small, green, leather-bound notebook, with the single word MOTOR in Roman capitals impressed in gold leaf on the cover. Over a hundred pages awaited the personal comments of the adventurer into the motor-car age. Father allocated the opposite pages to a kind of debit and credit layout, the left-hand pages to comments of a mechanical nature, and the right to journeys made.

The first entries on the left-hand page are brief and to the point: SEPTEMBER 17 [1907] *Buy 10-12 h.p. Peugeot Car.* SEPTEMBER 19 *Car arrives.*

The London representatives of the French makers had delivered the car by rail to their newly-appointed agents in the little Somerset town of Bridgwater. They, in turn, had instructed a bright, dashing young man called Brane, enjoying the *avant-garde* title of *Chauffeur*, to steer, drive and nurse the brand-new vehicle all twenty-seven and a half miles to where the doctor fretted for the moment that would provide the great landmark in his life.

The instant the car arrived it earned its first entry on the right-hand page. SEPTEMBER 19 *Willand to Tiverton Junction and back.*

The miracle had happened! It had gone not only *there* but *there and back*, safe and sound. Every right-hand entry during the first month of autumn, all sixty of them, contained that satisfactory consummation " and back."

The thrill of the moment was tempered with the added excitement of the strong probability that the purchase of the car was an extravagance hardly to be borne by the modest

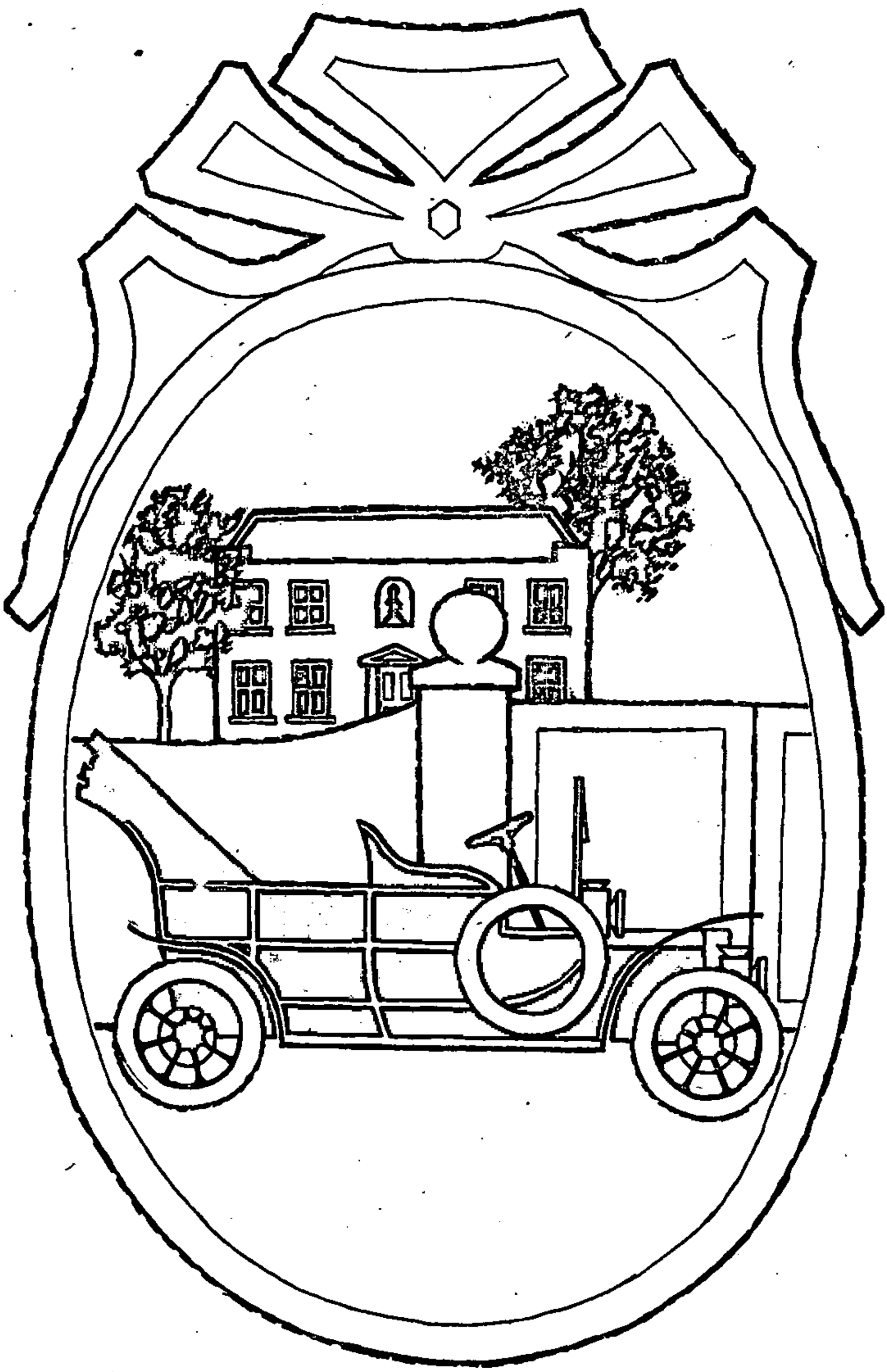

Illustration by Bryn Havord

income of a country doctor. Alice was not at home at that moment to share in the welcome. She was staying on for a few more days with friends in London. So that very evening Father sat down to enlist her sympathy, quell his nagging but delicious sense of unwarranted luxury, and allow his imagination full rein.

I believe I have bought the right car, the best small *one there is, and at the* right time. *£40 off list price, at the right place so* handy *for any repairs or replacements, and I believe I have the* right *chauffeur in the house at the present moment, a young fellow called Brane. He is very smart and* most intelligent.

As regards the expense, (1) it is always better to buy a sound *thing and not have endless repairs, than a cheap out-of-order-all-the-time baggage. Brane says he knows no* small *car like this for magnificent workmanship, everything is* solid, *genuine and* of the very best. *He does not see why we* should ever have a breakdown, *but advises that once in 8 or 9 months it should be overhauled so that if any pins or other gear are wearing or working loose they may be replaced.* (2) *Well we can run* 20 *miles on a gallon of petrol at 1s. 4d. The* hind wheel tyres *with non-slipping bands which ought to preserve us from* all danger *of slips will go on for no end of a time, at any rate* 8,000 *miles, the front wheel tyres (ordinary)* 5,000 *miles, and these last can, and should, then be* retreaded (*at half price) when they run another 2,500 miles—so* that *is not costly.—The extra wheel I purchased is splendid in case you get a puncture. All you do is fasten it on* outside the punctured tyre. *This can be done in* five minutes *and so run on without delay. To mend a puncture* on the road *takes one hour and a half. This, this interesting wheel entirely obviates. The only other expenses are the driver's licences, 5s. each, licence of car £2 10s. and insurance. I am sure this, though heavy, is necessary. £10.*

Re speed *of car, Brane says it is certainly a* rather slow *car. We shall not be able to do more than* 37 miles an hour on the level! *or average over 20 miles an hour in hilly country.*

Well my dear love, I have had my very first wee ride *in her this evening. Only from the station home, on my return from Wellington, but it was* thrilling.

We came down from the Chapel to the house at 25 miles an hour *and yet pulled up as easily, gently and quietly as ever could be. Quite a crowd gathered to see us off and I made a speech of much hilarity and the crowd cheered and the boys cheered and a great day in our village history was recorded.*

On the very next day, with his letter still in the post, a cloud as little as a man's hand can be detected on the debit page of the diary. SEPTEMBER 20 *Tyre burst outside Exeter.*

Both the 20th and 21st saw the gleaming motor carriage north, south, east, and west in quick succession. The four points of the compass all sang together like the cherubim.

I am just wild with delight. *This car is an event in our life and I am sure we will enjoy it amazingly. Brane, the chauffeur, is a* perfect *driver, and can let her all out. We did up to* 40 *miles an hour this morning and by merely adjusting the* accelerator, *bring her back* in less than no time *to the gentlest crawl or a full stop. He has only definitely used* one *of the brakes* once this whole day. *The other he has not touched. If you use the brakes a lot it is bad driving, strains the engine to pieces and wears the tyres out in no time. I don't think driving will be* a bit difficult *but I shall certainly not drive anything like as fast as the chauffeur.*

A motor car enlarges one's acquaintance, one's opportunities spiritual, social, etc., enormously. It is a revelation. *Times today were*: Willand to Cullompton $5\frac{1}{4}$ *minutes,* Exeter to Willand $38\frac{1}{2}$ *minutes,* Willand to Taunton *42 minutes,* Taunton to Willand *45 minutes. The car runs very easily, the slight shake-you-up and the fresh air are most exhilarating and create a big appetite and although we make a* terrific *dust for others we practically* get none.

Our one drawback: they have supplied us with rotten back tyres. *One* burst *this morn outside Exeter, nothing happened, the car did not even jolt or heave or jerk and, thanks to the extra patent wheel I bought for £13, we were free of the rotten thing and on the run again in* 10 minutes *from the time of the accident. You* will never want *to ride* behind a horse *again. I will give you a lovely time next week.*

The first four days of vehicular bliss were all too soon over, days of buffeting with the health-giving wind with cloth caps

on back to front, and exciting conversation about tyres and accelerators, brakes and magnificent workmanship.

As arranged, Brane, the perfect driver, with a golden sovereign in his pocket, took the car back to Bridgwater to repair the breaches in his sales armoury, the little matter of rotten tyres to be settled and, as the diary reveals, *to replace a cracked flange.* He took with him Gunner, the coachman, to be transmogrified within three short days into motor mechanic and chauffeur.

The car was to be measured for, and fitted with, two of its luxury extras, not quoted in the set-up price—a windscreen and a canvas hood. Back again at Willand with Gunner at the wheel, the car, during the next ten days was to be introduced to most of the county of Devon.

Alice was back and having her lovely time.

In the south-west, Plymouth saw them; in the north-east, Minehead; and, in between, such familiar landmarks as Tiverton, Dawlish, Teignmouth, Sidmouth and Budleigh Salterton flashed through the daily entries of the right-hand pages of the diary. All went without a hitch until October 5th, when a shocked entry remarks: *Could not start her! Found a valve was swollen. Filed and emeried its rod.*

The entry of October 8th seems to forebode that of the next day. The brakes were tightened up, a washer fitted to the tap—but in spite of these precautions the diary reports: *Ran over and damaged S. H. Thomas' dog. Its own fault entirely, owing to almost complete deafness.*

During the next few days we find an ominous sequence of entries on the debit side. OCTOBER 10 *Near hind tyre went down. Valve was torn off by riding on the rim* . . . OCTOBER 12 *Rotten French tyre burst through puncture . . . Stuck on two awful hills* . . . OCTOBER 15 *Gunner driving. Farmer Frost's horse reared at the sight of motor at Brick Houses and fell, breaking a shaft. No-one hurt and absolutely no fault of Gunner* . . . OCTOBER 17 *A broken bottle cut a* tremendous gash *in our Dunlop cover right through. Put a rotten French tyre in its place. This promptly punctured again in Tiverton and had to be mended there. Wire Bridgwater for new Dunlop* . . .

This being satisfactorily accomplished, Father took courage once more and Dorset was the next county to be explored and astonished from end to end. Four days later Devon needed another close inspection, and he set off for Exeter and the fair fields beyond, Salcombe and Totnes. This was a long run, and well after dark on the homeward journey the

light of the two brass headlamps of acetylene brilliance revealed an unexpected hazard.

OCTOBER 25 *Met a herd of cows 3 miles the other side of Totnes. Bent axle, steering rod, lamp brackets. Damaged lamps, much of this by striking hedge after striking 2 or 3 cows. Rubbed the Dunlop tyre a lot, crippling into Totnes where we had the steering rod straightened and wheels straightened. It was pitch dark.*

Family discussions after the event threw a little more light on the sad episode. One version which gained currency appears to have been cajoled out of Gunner who, without the burden of ownership, could afford to take a light-hearted and detached point of view.

It would appear that the indignity suffered by the third cow after the assault upon her sisters demanded retaliation, as she is said to have whipped around and deftly tossed away the red rubber hosepipe connecting the headlamps with the acetylene generator situated somewhere on the running-board. There was a loud explosion and the astonished cow immediately leapt the hedge and disappeared.

After limping home that night to confess the awful details to Alice and a flutter of teenage elder daughters, Father now reflects in his diary an immediate determination to put matters right: OCTOBER 26 *Run car to Bridgwater and leave her there for repairs and additions.* On the right-hand page Father boosted his wounded pride by a bellow befitting the stag at bay. In unusually heavy strokes he wrote and under-lined:

TOTAL MILEAGE RUN SO FAR
ABOUT
1,550 miles

Before November was out the doctor's daily rounds in the car had become commonplace, and he managed to fit in a run up to Huntsham woods for a few hours of shooting pheasants, a journey across to Sherborne to see his eldest daughter at her school and, best of all, Alice had plucked up sufficient courage to be driven around the village to make her quota of social calls and leave visiting-cards on her friends who were "not at home."

It was during this time that the pleasure of receiving back from Bridgwater one of the two damaged brass headlamps, duly repaired and in working order again, was dampened by an inquiry into the cause of the swiftness with which the supplies of petrol dwindled. This vital commodity had to be sent up

by train from Exeter in two-gallon cans and was fetched by pony chaise from the station. Trips to and from the station were becoming more frequent. The cause was soon revealed: *Have tested car. She is doing* 6½ *miles to the gallon!!!*

The car became yet another patient on his daily list, with a wasting disease to be cured without delay. NOVEMBER 26 *Gould of Exeter puts washer under the spray to raise it above level of petrol.* NOVEMBER 27 *Gould puts 2nd washer under spray and knocks it up as we find we are now doing 11 miles a gallon. Also fills tank and clears acetylene jet. Acetylene lamps went out and petrol ran out.*

The third month of the automobile age proved a great trial. Simply nothing went right. The lamps had indeed gone out and the petrol continued to disappear at an alarming speed.

It was the "spray" which appeared to be at the bottom of the trouble. Father was horrified by the mounting costs and by the brutal refusal of the machinery to reveal the secrets of its malaise. The word *why?* now finds its way into the diary after each new symptom of malfunction. NOVEMBER 30 *Find we had used* 6 *gallons of petrol for* 40 *miles only!! Visit Gould to complain and find that we have just done, my driving, 22 miles on a little over a gallon. Why is this? It seems inexplicable. Gunner cleans machinery thoroughly.*

DECEMBER 4 *Find we have only done* 58 miles *on* 8 gallons of petrol! *And filling up at Mr. Willie Rowe's with 2 gallons we used it nearly all on the 15 mile run to Exeter! Harrison runs out here with us to see how we drive etc. On this run of 15 miles we only use 5/8 of a gallon!!! WHY?*

DECEMBER 5 *Make astonishing discovery, viz. the 5/8 of gallon of petrol has leaked away during the night. Motor to Gould who says this is due to loss per spray and we must turn off the tap below tank every night. Try to affix new sprocket wheels. Find wrong ones have been sent.*

Try to affix Gamage's heel rest. They make a mess of it. Try to tighten the foot brake. They tighten the bridle all right but do not succeed in tightening the brake at all. We reckon we have done 30 miles on a gallon and a half *up to the time when we reached Exeter but we got through nearly 1 gallon in getting home those 15 miles.*

Father was swiftly becoming half demented with frustration, and his anguish spilled over on to the right-hand page, where on the same day he noted that the *Gratze speedometer brass holdfast breaks off.* This, let it be noted, was all happening while the doctor was faithfully doing his rounds,

administering to his patients. They cannot have failed to notice the cloud of depression which must have darkened his hitherto incorrigibly jovial face.

DECEMBER 7 *Footbrake almost useless.* DECEMBER 10 *Gould readjusts footbrake which very largely improves it. It had apparently been so tightened up that the cross bar came up against the end of the slot before the brake was full on.*

Try Gamage's heel rest and take it off again. It is useless. Put new thread in brass nut holding hood. Fill up.

Went in to Exeter at rate of 15 miles *to gallon. Came back, much 3rd speed at rate of about* 13 miles to gallon. *Going in, strong head wind and hood up. Coming back she went like a bird and* yet *with this result!*

This was certainly a change and far more satisfactory. Now motoring might become something of a pleasure again. December weather was setting in and the rolled, stone surface of the macadam was frozen and slippery. Now was the chance to try out her paces. On the next visit to Exeter the entry reads: DECEMBER 20 *Touched 27, 28 and 30 going down and* 34 *once coming out.*

This breakneck speed was more than she could stand. The following entries showed a return of the old malady: DECEMBER 21 *Most extraordinary petrol consumption. Willand to Huntsham 32 miles to 1 gallon. Huntsham to Willand 8 miles to 1 gallon . . .We* ran out *on the last journey to* our disgust. There must be a leak somewhere. DECEMBER 23 *Tom Button down to see if new sprockets will fit. Of course he finds they won't. He finds a bad petrol leak in the* filter, *the top of it being only half screwed down. He sets this right, but alas the running is* no better for it. *We use 2⅔ gallons of petrol on our 16 mile journey. T.B. also shows us that the blockage in drain pipe of radiator is only due to dried mud.*

The indignity of a blockage by dried mud in a car just three months old! The next day he recovered somewhat from this discovery by putting the brake back into the rear hole which "enormously increases its power," he was glad to say.

DECEMBER 27 *A delightful run some of it at 27 and one hill at* 35 (downhill naturally). *She went like a bird on the East wind-dried road. Petrol consumption baddish through 1⅔ to 14 miles.* DECEMBER 30 *Motored in frozen snow. She went wonderfully well—no skid worth mentioning.*

The New Year, 1908, opened auspiciously. Father had now completed his first 100 days as a motorist . . .

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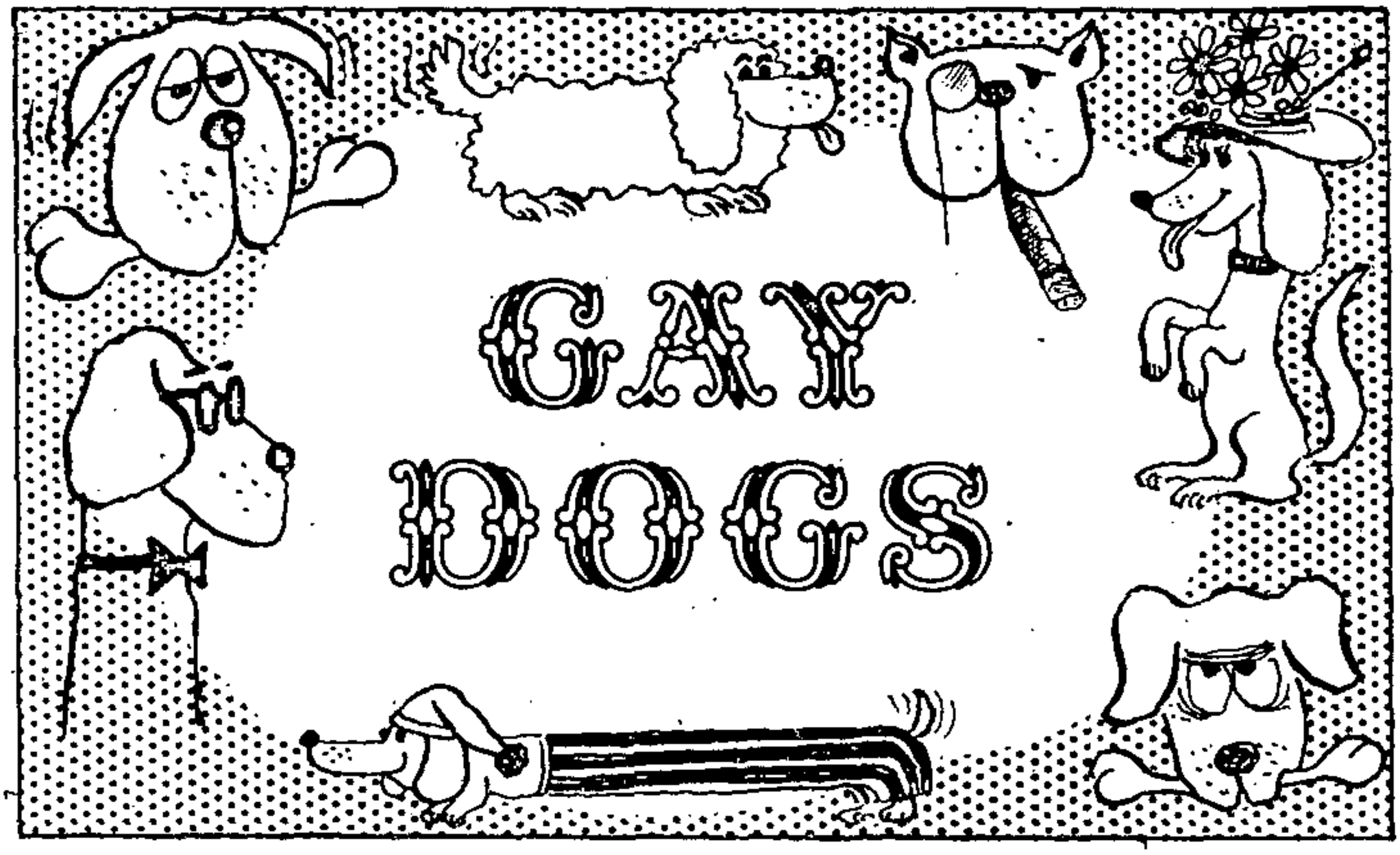


57 VARIETIES

Ugly was folded up on the back seat, coiled bonelessly round himself like a Chelsea bun. He was the satisfactory result of most of the larger breeds of dog. His broad, snaky head was pure bull-terrier as far as the ears, which were collie. He had a strong, deep-chested Alsatian body, a lurcher's back legs, and there was fox-hound about in his stubby, turned-in front paws, the banner carriage of his tail and the pattern of his black-and-white coat. He was as sentimental as a spaniel, as fey as a pedigree borzoi and as self-conscious as a young girl at her first dance.

Monica Dickens, *Thursday Afternoons*

KENNEL BLIMP

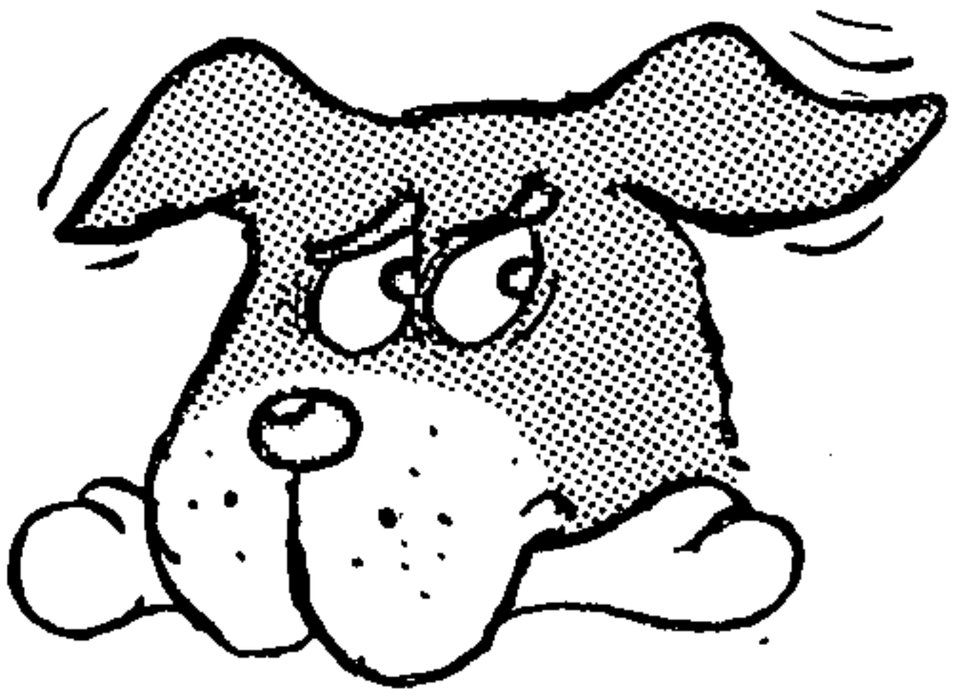
The dog was called Kroki because the kind donor had first presented me with a crocodile. This dachshund was an aristocratic creature, long-bodied and short-legged—truly resembling a crocodile—and its pendulous ears literally swept the floor. He was of an affecting friendliness and greeted me on our first acquaintance as only a dog can greet a long-lost master. Of course I was flattered until it became clear to me that he greeted everybody else in the same manner. He was obsessed by an overwhelming love of humanity which extended to all mankind.

Konrad Z. Lorenz, *Man Meets Dog*

Pup to the rescue!

The dogs, all three of them, had been admitted by my mother and lay in a long, damp heap on the sofa, asleep. One bright round eye opened when I dumped the wood on the andirons, and an animal wheezed. In the kitchen my mother smashed a plate. The heap of fur on the sofa stirred and milled itself into three individual dogs. The biggest, ears erect, bristled, leaped on to the window-sill and began barking at an imagined attacker. The smallest, the puppy, hurried into the kitchen, its pale tail-tip wagging low, undecided between fear and delight. I took the dustpan and brush and swept up the shards of blue plate and grains of sugar. The puppy tried to help and his solicitous, moist nose kept jostling my hand.

John Updike, *Of the Farm*



IT SHOWS IN THE END

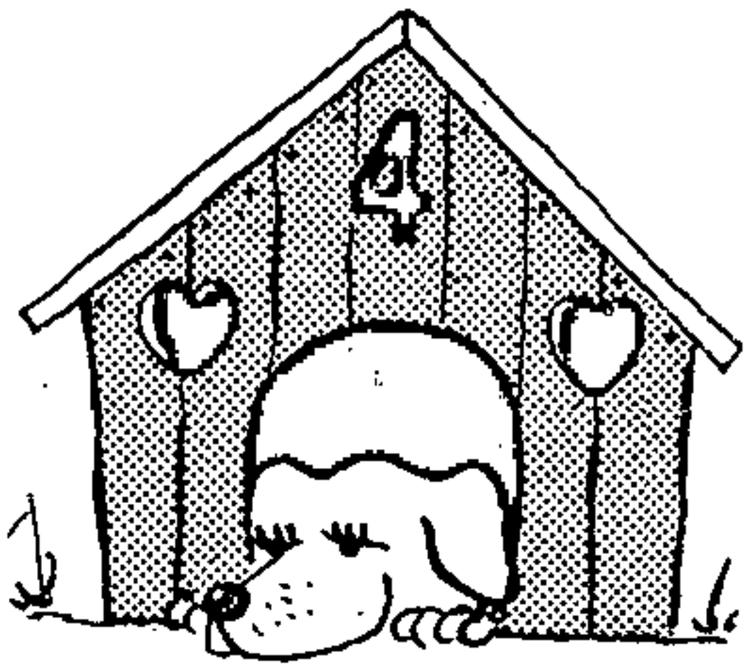
A dog will often steal a bone,
But conscience lets him not alone,
And by his tail his guilt is known.

Anonymous

On the floor, his scarred, bony head resting on one of the man's feet, lay an old white English bull-terrier. His slanted, almond-shaped eyes, sunk deep within their pinkish rims, were closed. One large triangular ear caught the firelight, flushing the inside a delicate pink, so that it appeared almost translucent. The true lover of an ancient and honourable breed would have recognised the blood and bone of his elderly and rather battered body, and would have loved him for his curious mixture of wicked, unyielding fighter and devoted and docile family pet. Above all for the irrepressible air of sly merriment which gleamed in his little slant eyes.

Sheila Burnford, *The Incredible Journey*

Jill



My fourth love? Such was my despair
I couldn't face a "she":
But then one day the winsome air,
The bright brown eyes and tousled hair
Of Jill enchanted me.

And she adored me too, with mind
And heart, and always will.
She knows I'm master (firm but kind—
Caressed, she waggles her behind—)
My Bitch! My Puppy! Jill!

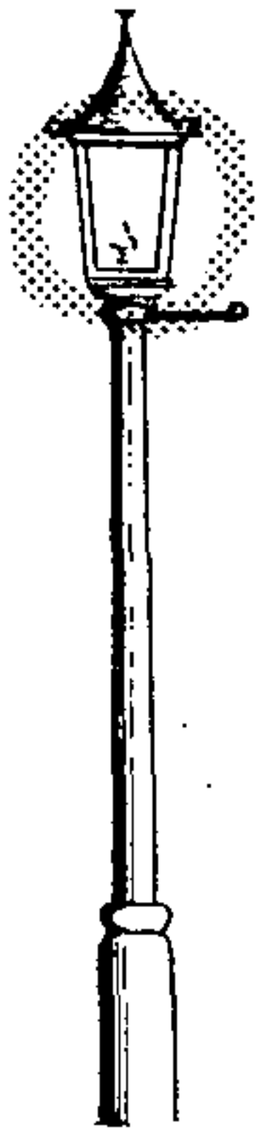
A. Silverlock, ***Last Love***

At break of day our company was off, with the dog Fido (such a name for a Siwash dog!) and myself in the traces, the doctor at the handlebars. What a great difference that strong, willing little dog made! His steady pulling kept the sled in motion and relieved one's shoulders of the galling jerk of the rope at every step.

At such times, too, one valued such a noble puller as our wheel-dog Nanook. When the lead line was pulled back Nanook would lunge forward and strain at the collar, mouth open and panting, tongue dropping moisture, as keen and eager to keep the sled going as the driver himself. One's heart goes out to dogs like Fido and Nanook as one realises what loyal cheerful service they give.

Archdeacon Stuck, ***Ten Thousand Miles With a Dog Sled***

DOGGED DEVOTION



My home is a haven for one who enjoys
The clamour of children, and ear-splitting noise
Of a number of dogs who are always about,
And who want to come in, or if in, to go out.

Whenever I settle to read by the fire.
Some dog will develop an urge to retire,
And I'm constantly opening or shutting the door
For a dog to depart or—as mentioned before—
For a dog to arrive who, politely admitted,
Will make a bee-line for the chair I've just quitted.

Ralph Wotherspoon, ***My Dumb Friends***

THIS STORY IS FROM BULGARIA. BUT THE PROBLEMS AND EMOTIONS WITH WHICH IT DEALS ARE UNIVERSAL AND OF OUR TIME . . .

MY FATHER

BY

PAVEL VEZHINOV

HE gets up earlier than I do, and always manages to be first in the bathroom. If he's been drinking the night before, that's when it shows; he begins to sing those endless songs of his, and always at the top of his voice. There's an echo in the bathroom, and he might be singing inside a sea-shell. Then that starts him coughing, and he does that, too, at the top of his voice, and shakes the whole place. Then, when he's coughed all over the mirror and the walls, he recovers himself, and starts to soap his smooth fat cheeks with genuine Palmolive.

I rolled out of bed in a nasty temper, and went into the kitchen. Tzana hadn't got a glance to spare me. That was usual enough, but this morning she was really mad about something, with a patchy flush on her bony face. When I was a kid she used to lay into me, and now she was probably regretting that she couldn't reach me any more. I sat down on the divan though, without thinking much about it, and that brought me pretty well down to her level. She flew at me across the room like a cat with its claws out, though she didn't go so far as to scratch.

She said I'd been drunk the night before. "If I were your

father," she said, growling in her chest like a man, "I'd show you the door this very minute. I don't know who it is you take after."

"Certainly not you!" I said spitefully.

That didn't need saying. This dry little woman, mostly made up of a bony face, didn't even reach to my shoulder. She was my father's elder sister, but she didn't live with us, just worked in the mornings. Every day on the dot of noon her husband would arrive; he was a gentle, timid little chap, almost bald, who was a rubber-down at the public baths. He would peck up his lunch in silence (it was what was left over from ours of the day before), and then like a little dog go and wait in a corner, and they would both leave before my father got home.

Bustling around the kitchen, she said, "We're Balkan folk, and that ought to mean that we're clean folk. Even when we were poor we didn't let it show in dirt. Your father used to be the smartest lad in town."

"He still thinks plenty of his looks," I said. "And dresses up to them."

She stopped to throw me an angry look. "Is that a proper way to speak of him? You're not a proper man if you don't respect your father."

I remembered that I didn't want to annoy her today, and just in time I shut up. It was never any use arguing with her, anyway; she could bury you in clichés.

When I didn't react, she waved me away in disgust and went on muttering to herself. "Well, I don't know what the world's coming to, but it's not to any good, you can be sure of that. You and your kind aren't going to build any new society. You and your kind couldn't build a hen-coop."

"I'm in no hurry to build anything."

"And just as well. Or I know the kind of mess you'd make of it—"

"Are those eggs ready?" I asked, diplomatically.

She brought me fresh toast from the grill. You had to hand it to her, she looked after you as well as anyone could.

"Listen," I said, "you wouldn't let me have three *levas* would you?"

She said after a pause, "What about the last two you had?"

"You'll get it all back."

She knew that. She was my only source of loans, so I always made a point of repaying every last *stotinka*, just to make sure that it would be there the next time I needed it.

She never gave very graciously, always with a scowl and a mutter, though I knew she liked giving.

"Oh, all right then," she agreed.

There was the first part of my plan accomplished. The second I hadn't too much hope of, because it depended not on Tzana but on my father.

He came in presently, and in his usual way sat down without a word of greeting. He was flushed and his eyes were bloodshot, but otherwise he looked pretty good, and not at all in a bad humour. That was the difference between us: he invariably looked the better for drink; his skin seemed to get tauter and his glance grew almost human. And, like all small men, he looked less than his age, and his hair was still black. Actually, it was only a month before this that I had discovered that this colour wasn't due entirely to his sturdy Balkan constitution; he dyed his hair regularly with a brush and some stuff from a bottle. I poured it down the lavatory, of course, but he only bought more, and when I threw that away too, he shouted at Tzana for it. So I had to leave it at that; there was no point in making trouble for Tzana.

She brought him his breakfast in silence. He behaved as if I were invisible, as if not only the kitchen but the whole of the world had never held such a person. His strong jaws worked vigorously, and the muscles on his temples moved with them. All his muscles were well-developed, but his expression was always taut and poised, as if at any moment he might burst out laughing. The look in his eyes wasn't at all like this; it was empty, or perhaps you'd call it expressionless. I think this was put on; he wasn't really at all calm or indifferent.

He asked suddenly, "This chap Lope de Vega—was he the explorer?"

"That was Vasco da Gama," I said. "Lope de Vega was a writer."

"What's he written?"

"Well, quite a lot. Including about two thousand plays."

He stared at that. "Honestly?"

"Honestly."

He thought about it for a bit.

"Well," he said, "I suppose writers in those days weren't paid as they are now."

"Too right. Or they'd have written less, and worse."

But he wasn't to be drawn into argument, and behaved as if I'd said nothing. He stuck his knife into the butter and scooped an enormous piece on to his bread.

His greediness had always irritated me. "You ought to go easy on the butter and eggs," I said casually. "They're not good for a man of your age, you know."

I knew that any mention of his age annoyed him. He said dryly, "And why?"

"They're full of cholesterol. It's bound to affect your brain."

"That's right," said Tzana from behind his back.

He didn't even look at her (but then, he never did). He just went on with his bread and butter. When he'd finished the slice he said confidently, "Don't anyone tell me that it's civilisation that has produced butter. It's butter that has produced civilisation."

I was surprised—he didn't usually go in for such wild generalities. "You really believe that?"

"Of course I do. Where were the really great brains born? The ones you're always talking about as great: Goethe, let's say, or Shakespeare. Always in some country where they ate plenty of butter."

"What about Switzerland?" I said, "or Denmark? What geniuses have they produced?"

"Must be some," he said confidently.

"Mention one, then!"

He said nothing. Of course he couldn't mention one! What did he know about it?

"Look, Father," I said, when we'd finished breakfast, "can I take the car tonight?"

"What do you want it for?"

"Some of us thought we'd go to The Hoof."

He was pulling on his overcoat, so I couldn't see his face. When he did turn his expression wasn't promising—in fact, he was angry. "So you can get drunk and smash it up by driving over some cliff, I suppose!"

Well, that's my father for you: no sign of any concern that *we* might be smashed up, too.

"I won't get drunk."

"How do I know that?"

"I promise you I won't."

"Oh, you promise!" he said acidly. "I know how much to rely on promises from young people today."

"I'm not talking about young people today," I said. "I'm talking about myself. You're not denying I'm your son, I suppose?"

Oh, I know him too damned well! He likes to think of

himself as inscrutable; in fact he bases his whole idea of his character on that. He thought about what I'd said, but his expression had changed—he wasn't going to admit that anything of his could possibly not be of the best.

"Look, son," he said more appeasingly, "the trouble is, tonight I need the car myself. I've got some foreigners to entertain."

"If it's on business, why on earth can't you take the official car?"

"You keep your advice to yourself," he said sharply. "You can have the car tomorrow night."

"Okay," I said, pretty dismally. This eternal, boring *tomorrow*! Tomorrow's never today—that's the motto of our gang. Strahill made it up, and though later on we threw him out of the gang, we still kept his motto.

"And what's so wonderful about The Hoof?" my father wanted to know.

"Nothing really. There's a Polish orchestra. And it's the only place—well, except for The Bar—where they Twist."

"And that's a fine reason!" said my father scornfully. He adjusted his felt hat and studied himself in the mirror. It was the first time that morning he'd really looked human, and he certainly liked what he saw there. He went briskly off without another word.

Feeling depressed, I went into his study. It's an old-fashioned room, but not bad: all respectability and rosewood. It must have been done before the war, when my father wasn't much more than a solicitor's clerk. There are ceiling-height book-shelves that are quite well-filled with books on his subject. He's started to read a bit again, but I doubt if it will be much help to him. He seems to doubt it himself too, however much use others make of this particular weapon—better use than he could ever make of it; at any rate, not many of the books are cut beyond the first few pages. On one wall there's a good picture of Danail Detchev's; he and my father were friends at one time, though what they had in common is beyond me.

I sat down in the comfortable desk-chair and leaned back. Why is it that I have to come in here, sit in his place, rummage in his drawers? I really ought to analyse this compulsion. Or perhaps not, in case it turns out to show some connection between us. But if that's so, it must be all the more necessary to analyse it. My brain never works well in the mornings; just then I didn't feel much like self-analysis.

There was nothing of interest in the left-hand drawers. In the middle one was the spare car-key, and a nice little enamelled lighter—a woman's. He'd probably got it last night, as a present from his foreigners, and this morning he hadn't been near the study. If he was drunk enough last night, he might think he'd lost the lighter then. I decided to keep it for a few days and then, if he didn't mention it, I'd give it to Bistra.

I pocketed it, along with the spare car-key. The right-hand drawers were locked, because he kept all his most secret stuff there. They were pretty poor locks, and if we hadn't turned Strahill out of the gang he'd have had them open in a second. But then, of course, he'd never have kept his mouth shut about it.

The telephone bell made me jump.

"Yes, who is it you want?"

Her voice was always pretty: quiet, but very clear. "Is that you, Evgeny?"

"Mother—" A thousand little bells as bright as humming-birds. "Yes, it's me."

"Is your father in?"

"He's gone to work."

"Perhaps that's as well," she said, after a pause. "Are you doing anything just now?"

"Nothing, Mother—I'm quite free."

"Can you come and see me? At my house."

"Not at the Institute? You're not ill are you?" I asked anxiously.

"I'm on holiday."

"Good. I'll be right over," I said, and rang off.

I had to take a deep breath. And later, when I bent down to kiss her cheek, I saw her calm loving eyes, but there were no bright bells that time. There was nothing but a vague pain, a pain I never feel anywhere but with her. That's why I never visit her, however much I love her. I felt it first on the day she left us. It's not as bad now, but it's still here, as threatening and inescapable as the fear of death. It's not a feeling that she will ever understand—perhaps because she isn't alone, and doesn't live for herself alone. There is a wonderful look of tranquillity and gentleness about her. She loves me, naturally; but she can't know about this pain. If she knew about it, how could she be so serene?

I sat down on the nearest chair, but she said, "No, not there."

"Why not, Mother?"

"You'll be more comfortable here."

I moved to an armchair and said, "Right you are."

She had turned away to open the glass doors of the sideboard.

"Would you like cherry-brandy?"

"Please. Unless you could make it a small cognac."

"Of course," she said.

Cognac will make the pain sharper, but then it will ease it quicker.

"You've bought a television, Mother."

"We could just afford it," she said, and smiled for the first time. "Is that a large enough cognac?"

"You could leave me the bottle," I said.

She looked searchingly at me. "You haven't started to drink, have you?"

"Oh, there's no danger of that."

"Well, you mustn't," she said calmly. "You take after my side of the family, and none of us drink; it doesn't agree with us."

"Is this Bulgarian cognac?"

"No. Peter brought it back from the fair."

Peter was her husband. She very rarely mentioned him to me. I poured myself another drink, and there was no protest on her face, no disapproval; she just sat quietly there with her hands folded in her lap.

"First of all," she said, "I must tell you why I telephoned. It's a piece of good news for you, or so I hope."

It was a piece of staggering news. Ten years ago she and my father had each taken out an endowment policy for ten thousand *levas*; if one of them died, I was to get the money. Since they were both still alive, the money, of course, was still in my name.

"So in a way the money is mine, and in another way it isn't," she said, "because I always meant it for you anyway. So I've put it in the savings bank for you."

She took from a drawer a red booklet and gave it to me. It left me speechless with astonishment. There, in the savings column, opposite my name, was a thousand *levas* of the new issue.

"Does this mean that I can draw it out whenever I want it?"

"Of course it does, silly," she said, and stroked my hair. "But don't go and spend it all at once, will you? You're only

twenty; still, it's time you learned to be independent, and how are you to do that if you have to ask for money for everything you want to do?"

I thought it all over.

A little uncertain, I asked, "Do you think I should tell *him*?"

She said quietly, "I think you ought to."

"Yes, but I don't have to. Why didn't he tell me about these policies?"

"You mean, why doesn't he give you the money, too?" She smiled. "Well, it's different in his case. He's keeping you, don't forget."

"Yes, but he could have told me," I persisted.

"Well, you should know your father by now," she said. "Don't worry about it, anyway... He should have given you a little of it, perhaps."

She fell silent and I fancied she had started thinking of other things. I took advantage of it to pour myself another cognac.

She asked suddenly, "Do you ever see Lili?"

Lili was her step-daughter.

"Now and again. Why?"

She was obviously not sure how much to say, but I could see that she was worried. "There's something wrong with the girl," she admitted. "She's got so absent-minded just lately. And she's not doing so well at the University."

I tried to think sensibly about Lili, but my thoughts wouldn't settle on her.

I said at last, "I could ask around. How would that be?"

"So long as you go about it tactfully," she said.

They were at the usual table behind the blue curtains of the big window. Of the three of them, only Bistra looked at me as I joined them, and as usual I felt her glance boring into me at high speed like a dentist's drill. I've often thought about that habit of hers—not really a feminine one—of, as it were, taking one deep specimen boring and then spending hours analysing what it's brought up.

"Something the matter?" she asked alertly.

I said casually, "Nothing, Pepe."

She didn't believe this, and for a long time went on examining me through her eyelashes. Certainly I had twenty new notes of five *levas* each in my pocket, but how could this do anything to my appearance? In looks, Bistra is less a girl

than a sparrow; she seems small and brittle, and this is misleading. Her face is lively, and not really pretty; she looks rather like a charming old grandmother. But when she lets me kiss her behind the ear—well, then I know there will never be anything better in my life.

"A drink?" I suggested, "would you like something really good?"

"Nothing's good here."

"Never *mind* that."

"You've got hold of some money then?"

"Well, enough for that."

"You've stolen it!" she said with conviction. "You've murdered some old woman, like Raskolnikov, and you feel guilty. I saw it the moment you walked in."

At last Vlado and Jean deigned to take notice. It all seemed simple to them: I'd pinched the money from my father. Not that they blamed me for that. How else were four students to get money? One of us has to do it one day, another the next day; we have to live, after all. Jean was the one who most often had money; he was wearing a marvellous drip-dry shirt with a leather tie, and rolling a cigarette on his lip. Vlado practically never had any, at least to share; however much he got, he spent it by himself, the bastard, on piles of books.

I told the waitress, "Four gin fizzes. With ice."

"What did you think you'd get?" she said tartly, "bricks?" and went off. She's a sombre woman, and always argues with customers of our sort. The older ones she just stares at as they speak. She obviously thinks that we've no right in a smart *pâtisserie*, and I think she ought to be stuck behind a bar.

Vlado and Jean went on talking, or rather Vlado talked and Jean listened. Jean never bothers to listen unless it's something serious, so I took notice myself, though science isn't much in my line.

My line, actually, is Bistra, but she feels happiest when no-one talks to her. What she really likes doing is watching others.

Vlado was explaining how the cancer virus penetrates the cell; you might have thought, to hear him, that he'd watched it all happening. It seems that it's only the nucleus of the virus that does the penetrating; two nuclei of the same kind then combine, and thus become the parents of the various biocurrents.

"In fact," Vlado said triumphantly, "these nuclei are micro-cybernetic machines, and contain in themselves the whole hereditary code."

I looked at him in surprise. So this little chap with the long hair and the dirty raincoat really had some brains! Everything fell into its logical place: the nucleus of the virus substitutes for the nucleus of the human cell, and in this way passes on the hereditary code, so that the human cell begins to divide under the instructions of the virus.

Jean was delighted. "The genius among the parasites!" he said.

"Did you make it up yourself?" I asked Vlado.

"Does it matter?" Vlado asked meekly.

Oh blast his evasions! I tried a little pressure. "Well, look. According to you, the antibiotics destroy only the albuminous cover of the virus, thus leaving the nucleus in the blood. Right?"

"Right!" Vlado said happily.

"Then why hasn't humanity perished by now?"

"But aren't we all on the way to perishing?" said Vlado. Logically, this was unanswerable.

Since he has taken up cybernetics, Vlado seems to have gone slightly mad. Or is he simply slightly sane? He believes that there is a basically insoluble, and basically tragic, contradiction between the biological nature of man and the possibilities of his further development. He is quite convinced that in another thousand years Earth will be populated by electronic robots. These creatures will have human consciousness and some form of emotional life (what form, Vlado can't quite convey to us). Their mental range will be enormous and, of course, they will be immortal. The interest of their emotional development will be equalled only by the interest of their technical perfectibility.

It is significant that Bistra listened to this theorising with contempt, always ready to cut our home-grown genius down to size.

She interrupted him now: "Do stop this awful rubbish. It'd be much more useful if you'd think about what we're doing tonight."

I offered to take them all up to The Hoof in a taxi, but this wasn't too well received. Get there by taxi, all right, but how do we get back?

Vlado proposed that we should join Rumen; he could persuade him to take us all. Another suspicious silence.

"Isn't Rumen the most awful bore?" Jean said guardedly.

"No-one with a car is a bore," said Bistra.

I never know if she's making fun or talking seriously. In any case, she decided us; we'd go with Rumen. And Zvezda must come too; four men to one girl wouldn't do, though Bistra seemed quite willing to take on that responsibility.

While we were arranging all this, Lili came into the *pâtisserie,* along with a short, hairy chap wearing a leather jacket. She was as well-dressed as ever; she's quite pretty, I suppose, but there's nothing to her but a smooth oval face and a pair of big eyes—no individuality at all. She gave me a sort of contortion of the lips that did for a smile.

"Who's that with Lili?" I asked, after a bit.

"Oh, some peasant," Jean said in contempt. "He tries to make all the girls by telling them that women are inferior to men. And the girls, of course, try to prove him wrong."

I looked him over. I don't like men with hair-lines that overhang their foreheads, nor with such dirty matted hair as that. That part of his head must have been in total darkness. He sat sprawled half over the table, talking in a lordly way, and Lili was doing nothing but look at his lips. Her face was quite expressionless, and I thought she was probably annoyed by his vulgarity. She's not clever, but she's certainly sensitive, and most likely weak: this beast had found her easy.

A bit later two more of the same kind, except that these two had curly hair instead of matted, came in and joined them. Lili just sat more stiffly.

"Do stop staring!" Bistra said to me.

"The one with Lili, Pepe—how'd you like him as your boyfriend?"

"Ugh!" she said, without even examining him.

"Lili's touched bottom all right," I said, almost to myself.

"Nonsense," said Bistra. "All that's the matter with her is too good a heart."

"How's your heart?"

Bistra smiled. When she smiles, her eyes behind her lashes sparkle like stars.

"Oh me: but I'm a free soul," she said. "I can be good, bad, vain, sentimental, naive, anything you like, just as the situation demands."

"What does *free* mean?"

"Depends on the situation. By definition."

"No, that's illogical," I said. "You can't be free and still be bound by a situation."

"That's what you think," she said scornfully. "If you want to be free, then you have to use the situation."

I hadn't noticed Lili coming; I only heard her trembling voice. "Do you mind if I sit here?"

I made room for her next to me. The fellow with the matted hair was looking grimly ahead of him as if nothing had happened, and the other two were grinning. I could see that Lili was having a job to keep herself under control.

"Let me get you a drink."

"No," she begged. "Please don't bother."

Her lip was trembling, and suddenly I felt very sorry for her.

"Look, Lili," I said: "we're practically brother and sister, so don't mind if I say too much. Can't you cut that young brute out? Take a grip on yourself and tell him to beat it."

She said nothing, but her colour deepened.

"Isn't that right?" I said to Bistra.

"Definitely," she said.

I took Lili's thin little hand and kissed the fingertips, with their pale varnish. All at once the tears streamed down her face.

Bistra watched calmly, with not the least sign of emotion. Finally she said, "In the end, everyone is right for himself. In the end, only Lili knows what is best for Lili."

About seven that evening we set off for The Hoof in Rumen's car. Bistra sat next to Rumen, with Zvezda by her. Zvezda has a long neck on which her immobile head seems only to be balanced, as if it might tumble off at any moment. Her expression is immobile too, but not her body, which is extraordinarily agile. She's good company, because, like Elotchka the Man-Eater, she only knows about a hundred words and she uses them in such odd combinations that she's always amusing.

It was dark in the car, just the green speedo-light shining; there was a man singing on the radio, but Rumen fiddled until he found some jazz. Only Vlado and Jean talked. Jean insisted that *Tortilla Flat* was Steinbeck's only good novel, which I thought nonsense. The six-cylinder car ate up the steep kilometres, the cat's-eyes flickering past us on either side. It was more like flying than driving, along a way laid down by the headlights for us alone. Behind us there rose gradually a shoreless sea of stars—just a bit dimmed by the tail-end of the autumn mists. Suddenly Rumen braked.

"The best is Queen Anne," I said.

"Splendid."

A little later, when we were on our first whiskies, Bistra leaned over to me. "Unless you behave, I'll never come out with you again," she murmured.

She didn't often use this voice, but I knew it well enough. "All right," I said.

"Ask the secretary to dance."

"All right."

The secretary danced very well, but I felt too sulky to talk to her as I should have done. After some time she said, "You dance beautifully."

"Maybe because I can't do anything else."

"You're too modest," she said smiling. "You speak English well too; they were very impressed by you."

Bistra was making good use of my absence. I could see her purring at my father, weaving a fine web of looks and smiles around him. And the old fool was as good as caught already; his face was red and he looked as wrought-up as a young boar.

To stop myself getting even angrier, I guided the girl towards the other side of the floor. She was dancing with enjoyment, her soft body warmly yielding to me, and after a time I forgot Bistra, I forgot all the devils inside me. My heart felt lighter, and the feeling of the girl's warm body spread through mine and made me dizzy. I didn't know if it was just the feel of her, or her obvious kindness and generosity; but whatever it was I knew that it was what I wanted and hadn't got.

Afterwards we stayed on whisky, and our two parties got mixed up. The elder foreigner fastened like a leech on to the Black Orchid; the other had his eye on the secretary, but she kept him at arm's-length, and now and again gave me a warm smile that invited sympathy. I didn't dance with her again: her friendly face made me ashamed of the way I'd wanted her. My father, though, was dancing most of the time with Bistra, and I could see the way he put his arm round her—as if he never wanted to take it away again.

Then we started the Twist. Probably we shouldn't have dared if a red-haired German girl who was slightly plastered hadn't worked us up first. Bistra danced with Jean and the Black Orchid with me, and only an idiot could have denied that the girls were made for that dance. The orchestra caught our excitement and played as if they were inspired. Just for one moment I had a glimpse of the angry and disgusted face

"A fox!" he said, as quietly as if afraid of startling it.

The two girls leaned forward so quickly that they almost bumped the windscreen. And there she was, a little golden fox, one paw lifted, her eyes shining like green magic. The girls watched entranced, hardly daring to breathe.

"She's gone!" said Bistra, in disappointment.

The car took to its wings again, flying up the mountain, warmth flowing from the heater. If my father hadn't invented his idiotic excuse, I'd have been in the driving seat, with Bistra next to me. It's only at high speeds that something like dependence shows on her charming little face. But I find driving alone almost as exhilarating and as the speedo-hand goes round, an extraordinary feeling of lightness comes over me—I really can't describe it.

The Hoof was quite empty, with the newly-set tables decked out with international flags and RESERVED tickets. The double-bass player was peering from the platform into the next room, where the waiters were obviously getting things ready for an important party. Stefan came to our table looking apprehensive, but what we ordered relieved him of that worry.

"Did you really murder some old woman?" Vlado asked, very much as if he believed I had.

"Sure," I said, "a little fat old woman."

He started wanting to know where I'd hidden the body, and would the police be questioning them about it, and then unexpectedly shut up. A square man, whose trousers would have looked better if they'd been a bit longer, came in, took a suspicious look at us, and then cornered the leader of the orchestra who had a boyish hair-cut and a jacket zebra-striped in red. The square man's moustache was all but bristling with urgency. We got it then; the proprietor, to preserve the good name of the restaurant, was ordering that in honour of the Great Man who was coming nothing but waltzes and polkas must be played.

Still, they started with a tango. And at this very moment in walked my father, with two round, half-bald little men and a dishy girl. He spotted me straight away, of course, but went to his table. His guests took their places with their backs to us, and my father and the girl sat down watching the dance-floor. This was a piece of consideration that made quite an impression on me. The girl was listening to him so deferentially that I could see she was one of his office staff.

"That's my father," I told Bistra, "by the girl in blue."

"No!" she said in interest, and at once set her examining

apparatus to work. "Her frock's green, actually. And if you're interested, she's very well got up. Is she his girlfriend?"

"No, from his office."

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"Lord, no!" I said. "He's far too nervous for that; afraid of doing anything that might affect his job."

Five minutes later, Bistra announced, "Well, she obviously likes him."

"She's trying to keep on the right side of him."

"You don't understand," she said with conviction.

They got up to dance, Jean with Bistra and Vlado with the Black Orchid, as we called Zvezda. Rumen was already on his second cognac, his full red lips darkened by his smoking, and he was watching Zvezda. So was I. There weren't many such figures, or many better dancers.

As if he knew what I was thinking, Rumen said under his breath, "Yet she's as cold as a fish!"

"Aren't they all!" I said.

"Who are you kidding!" he said scornfully. "That's a hot little cat you've got yourself."

I felt as if he'd thrown something dirty straight into my face. If he hadn't still had his eyes on the dancers, he must have seen it. Did he really know what I didn't? Or was he simply talking? But Bistra was such a little thing, and there was nothing in her looks to suggest passion or sensuality. When she came back to the table I said quietly into her pretty little ear, "Bistra, has Rumen ever been your lover?"

She whipped round to look straight at me. "And have you ever been a hanging judge?"

"No, tell me."

"Not him," she said, and went on watching my father's table.

This wasn't quite so unbearable. I'd never actually asked her if she was a virgin, and she'd never given me any kind of hint. Girls nowadays hide virginity for fear of having it laughed at. But everything about Bistra seemed somehow young and untouched; she was as different from the Black Orchid as heaven from earth. Yes—that's the right way to put it: heaven from earth.

"Do you know," she said, "your father's rather gorgeous."

"Rot!" I said sharply. "He's no bigger than a dwarf."

"Oh really! Why do you think everyone should be just like yourself?"

"Well, you do the same."

But she wasn't listening. Gleefully she said, "I know what. I'll marry him!"

I could have hit her little frog face. But her idea delighted her.

"Oh marvellous!" she said, and squeezed my hand. "And then I'll be your mother! We could stay at home all day kissing. He'd keep us both—"

"You're going to get beaten up," I said in a fury.

She was astounded, her eyebrows going up. "But what for?"

Before I could answer, there was a flurry in the restaurant, and the Great Man himself came in. (He's a Nobody now.) Maliciously I kept my eyes on my father. I could see—I could almost feel—how much it mattered to him to be noticed by the Great Man, and acknowledged too, of course, with a smile and a handshake. If his head had been on a spring like a jack-in-the-box, he'd have popped it across the restaurant and offered it to the Great Man. And when it seemed as if he wouldn't be noticed, he actually got to his feet and stood practically in the way.

Just in time the Great Man saw him, and stopped to shake hands, though even then with half his attention somewhere else. The two half-bald little men were on their feet too, respectfully looking up. As I'd thought, they were foreigners. My father introduced them, and the hand-shakes this time were more cordial and less absent-minded. The girl, of course, was standing at the back, obviously considering herself below notice.

"Tell them," the Great Man said to her, "that I wish them all success in the trade talks."

She translated, and one of the foreigners replied neatly, "That depends only half on us, sir."

The Great Man smiled vaguely and moved on, followed by his entourage. As he passed the orchestra, the red zebra and his men bowed their donkey heads. After that the usual restaurant clatter started up again and the waiters, who had momentarily frozen into statues along the walls, started their usual sweating runs through the smoke-filled room.

The orchestra struck up another tango, but none of us got up. Bistra suddenly announced, "I'm going to ask your father to dance."

"Are you off your head?"

Before I could grab her she smoothed down her short skirt and made with her quick bird-like step for my father's table.

With a dazzling smile she said, "Evgeny is giving you his turn with me."

I saw my father hesitate for a second, and glance at the other room before he got up. His smile was a little forced, but as soon as they were lost in the crowd on the floor he relaxed and began to dance not at all badly. Much as I despised him just then, I did at least feel relieved; if he'd made an exhibition of himself by being rude, part of the shame at any rate would have been mine. I couldn't hear what they were saying, of course, but Bistra's small face was lifted to him as attentively as if he had been baring his soul to her. They danced the encores too, and my father went back to his table a little flushed but plainly pleased with himself. Bistra came back to us, but didn't sit down.

"Your father wants us to join him," she said.

"We're having our own party," I said drily.

Her face did not change, but her eyes were steely. With obvious control she said, "You come along."

"Yes, come," said Rumen, "and then we can dance with your father's popsy."

I got up and went to join them. The foreigners were nicer than I had expected, though of course they had to start off by saying they wouldn't have thought such a youthful-looking father could have such a tall son. The girl translated, and then smiled at me herself.

"I'm surprised too," she said. "You aren't at all like him."

"It's my only consolation," I said.

Bistra was having a lively talk with my father, but that didn't stop her overhearing this. She gave me a warning glance, but my father hadn't heard. The elder, and nicer, of the foreigners said to him, "And what would our young guests like to drink?"

"Whisky," I said.

"You speak English, then?"

"If you call that much speaking English."

"You Bulgarians are modest people," he declared.

My father had understood all this, and was frowning at me.

"As if you couldn't do without whisky!" he said in an undertone. "You know it has to be paid for in foreign currency."

"All right, I know. Don't talk about currency. They'll understand."

They did understand. "It doesn't matter at all," said the elder. "Just as long as it's good whisky."

of my father, and that made me dance the better. Finally the orchestra gave up, and we all sat down. The last thing I noticed was the undisguised interest on the face of the Great Man in the next room, and this reassured me a little. My father refused to look at me.

A bit later I began to feel very sick. I went to the lavatory and tried to vomit, but it was no good. I stood there for a time, weaving on my feet, and in the mirror my face was deathly white. When I went back, Bistra took me to our own table. The orchestra had packed up and the waiters were presenting the bills. It was too hot, and the lights were blinding. Bistra kept her back to my father's table, and stayed grimly silent. I tried to hold her hand, but she pulled it away.

"Try some soda-water," she said dryly.

I spilt some of it down my shirt. I must have looked pretty wretched, because she relented a very little.

"Don't drink more than you can hold," she said more gently. "Look at your father. He's had just as much as you to drink."

I don't remember very much after that. Outside, a K.A.T. lieutenant told Rumen that he'd confiscate his licence if he so much as tried to drive.

Someone suggested that we could sleep at the hotel, and Bistra said categorically, "I have got to get home tonight."

From somewhere in the darkness appeared my father. He must have heard it all, because he told us to wait until he got back. Well, he certainly wasn't doing that for me, or for Vlado's dirty face. He got into his car, and I began to shout, "Why don't you take his licence? He's had just as much to drink."

The others made me shut up. The K.A.T. man scowled at me and went over to my father. He talked to him for a bit, and then saluted and went away.

"You're impossible!" Bistra said in a fury. "Go to hell!"

I went outside on the veranda and looked at the stars. But I was afraid to look at those above my head; it made me shiver even to think of the icy darkness they floated in. The ones beneath, the stars of the city, were close and warm; they twinkled from every quarter. I wanted them to line up and do a solemn march for me, but they wouldn't budge—they just twinkled away indifferently. I got angry with them; I shouted and spat at them; but they still paid no attention. I started to cry, and then they turned blurred and died.

When I opened my eyes there was a whole river of light

beneath me, flowing from Knajevo towards a whirlpool in the centre. There was a whole sea of lights spreading to the horizon, and in the distance a small reddish radiance in the darkness. That is the earthly Andromeda, and this is a lost and drunken boy whose only answer to all the world is to spit on it...

Later Bistra came silently and stood beside me. By then I was sobering up. I asked, "Where are the others?"

She said a little bitterly, "Rumen's bolted."

"And you? And me?"

"Someone has to wait for your father."

Looking at her in the darkness I realised that in her thin frock she must be frozen. I took my jacket off, though she tried to stop me.

"No, it doesn't matter. Well, just over my shoulders then."

I put the jacket round her, and felt that her lively little body was quite still and cold. She said no more until my father arrived. I thought she would sit in front in the car, but she came in the back with me. My father kept quiet; he was obviously angry. He drove fast and with confidence, the tyres whistling round the sharp corners. The headlights swept in front of us, giving life to stones and trees that died a split-second later.

My father said at last, "That whisky did you no good at all."

"He's all right now," said Bistra.

This was true. She was on my right, and I could feel that side of me completely frozen.

"And you needn't have wound up with the Twist."

"Why?"

"First of all," he said, "because it's not a proper dance. Not if everyone can't dance it."

"You mean because you can't."

"What difference does that make?"

"There it is in a nutshell!" I said. "I don't want to do just what you can do. All I want to do is what you disapprove of."

My father gave me a swift look over his shoulder. "I hope you're ashamed of yourself," he said.

Bistra dug her elbow into me. "Comrade Ignatov," she said gently, "do we have to spoil a pleasant evening?"

"It's not you I'm angry with," said my father.

"Not really?" she said doubtfully.

"Not the smallest bit."

"Well then—make it all right! Take us on to The Bar."

For a long time it seemed as if he hadn't heard. Finally he said, "People of our kind don't go to The Bar."

"Why not?" Bistra asked.

"Because he's frightened of his precious reputation!" I put in.

"Couldn't you take your son, and—and perhaps your future daughter?" she said in a rush. This startled my father; his eyes found us in the driving-mirror.

"It's too late," he said coldly. "I've an appointment with the Minister tomorrow, and I shall need a clear head."

"Muddled heads are much more fun," said Bistra.

"Now don't insist and force me to refuse," he said, and there was a trace of real regret in his voice. "I'll take you another time, I promise."

"Really?"

"Really!" he said.

The tyres were still hissing on the road, and the headlights sweeping a clear path through the darkness.

He'd gone next morning by the time I got up; I hadn't the strength to face him. When the front door slammed behind him I got dressed slowly and crawled into the kitchen.

Tzana glared at me, and then exploded. "You weren't here for either lunch or dinner yesterday. Is this what you call a home?"

"No, it bloody well isn't!" I said.

And then I remembered that yesterday I'd bought her a present. I went out and was back with it in a second. And there she was, my aunt, holding the woollen cardigan, hardly believing her eyes. Her hard face had softened, and it wasn't easy to recognise her at that moment. At last she sighed, folded the cardigan, and delivered herself of a pronouncement: "I always knew your heart was in the right place."

And then as she saw me sitting at the kitchen table, she had to add roughly, "And it wouldn't hurt you to go and wash first!"

Bistra lives quite near. I rang her bell and waited. There were no answering sounds, just a nasty depressing silence. All her family go out to work, so if she had a lecture the flat would be empty. I was just going to ring again when I heard a faint movement. The door opened, and in the crack appeared Bistra's sleepy face.

"Oh, it's you," she said without enthusiasm. "Well, come in."

She was barefoot, in a long silk nightdress. I went in. Their hall is square, and about the size of a barrel. I held her close, but her silky body slipped through my hands and she disengaged herself. Her look was direct, surprised, and chilly.

"Do stop such nonsense!" she said without anger.

I followed her from the hall. Her small white feet pattered over the tiled floor, and inside the pink silk her body moved lithely. We went into her bedroom. The blue eiderdown was thrown half-off the bed, as if she had only just got up. She slid back between the warm sheets, and for a second I saw her slender white legs.

"Sit down," she said.

With trembling hands I pulled a blue stool up to the bed. We were quite alone in the flat, and if I'd wanted to I could have strangled her. But in her clear eyes there wasn't the slightest apprehension.

"Yóu look awful," she said, "as if you'd just crawled up from the drains."

I said nothing.

"And last night," she added, lifting a finger in reproach, "you really did overdo it."

"I think you overdid it."

"Me?" she said in bewilderment. "How?"

"You flirted miserably with my father."

"Miserably?" she crowed. "Now just how was it miserable?"

"Because you were doing it in front of me! And because he's old enough to be your father."

"Thanks, but I've got one father," she said ironically. "And when one goes out every day with teenagers, a real man makes a nice change."

This time I laughed spontaneously.

"He's anything but a real man! He's the very opposite of anything you could call manly."

"Are you telling me!" she said sarcastically.

"Yes, I am telling you! I'm not much myself, but what I am is genuine, at any rate! He's a fake through and through. He's never in his life had an original idea, he's completely spineless, his social conscience doesn't exist. All he's got is his position, and that he hangs on to like a drowning man. You try to breathe on that, and he'll kick you into the gutter straight off."

"You sound almost grown-up!" she said in surprise.

"I may be the worst fool on earth," I shouted at her, "but I'm not cruel and I'm not selfish. Don't you realise what an idiot you made of yourself last night?"

She lifted her eyebrows. "Oh? And how?"

"Didn't he flatly refuse to take you to The Bar? And after you'd done worse than asked—after you'd really got down and begged."

Her small face flushed and her full lips thinned. In a bored voice she said, "You never understand anything."

"I certainly understand that he's never going to take you," I said. "Not because he doesn't want to, but because he's afraid of getting talked about. Is that sort of cowardice what you call manly?"

Her eyes lit up like stars.

"I'll prove you're wrong!" she said firmly. "Fetch me the telephone from the hall."

I brought it in in a sort of daze, and she plugged it into the socket beside her bed.

"What's his number?"

Like an idiot I told her, and she dialled it with her little finger.

"Is that Comrade Ignatov? Good morning, Bistra speaking," she said, and her face changed oddly. It brightened, and yet somehow it softened, too. "Are you angry with me for ringing you?"

She cuddled the receiver close and gave me a little wink. In spite of that, I could hear quite clearly an unrecognisable voice, a soft and friendly voice that I had never heard before.

"Oh yes!" said Bistra. "In fact I could give you a chance to make amends... Why not today?... No, really?" She laughed. "Yes, that would be fine. What about the Berlin *pâtisserie*, about seven? It's quite easy to find... Well, all right! You don't have to come in—I'll watch out for you."

The receiver clicked down. I was so staggered I didn't dare move.

"Well?" she said in triumph.

I was silent.

"*Now* will you admit that you simply don't understand?"

But I could hardly take in what she said.

"You're not really going out with him?" I said at last.

Perhaps my voice surprised her a little. She looked searchingly at me, and said a little hesitantly, "N—o. I'll meet him, but only to say I'm sorry. It would be too childish if I didn't do that much."

And how was I going to be sure she wouldn't stay with him?

It was humiliating to have to hide behind the attendant's box in the car park. My father arrived on the dot of seven, and stopped his car outside the *pâtisserie*. Bistra came rūnning out, and immediately snuggled down into the front seat. I noticed, though, that before she got into the car she took a quick look around, as if she sensed that I was hanging about.

The car started, turned right, and picked up speed in the direction of the Plovdiv main road. I lost its rear lights among the others on the Eagle Bridge.

At that moment I was empty of every feeling but deep, unbearable shame. I ran, so that no-one passing should see that I was crying. Under the chestnuts, where it was darker and there were no people, I stopped, wiped my face on the sleeve of my raincoat, and tried to stop my lips trembling. At last merciful thoughts started to take shape in the emptiness of my mind.

Luckily there were taxis waiting in the rank by the Eagle Bridge.

"Pancharevo!" I said, and huddled myself into one corner, as if it were cold winter.

If they were not in The Swan, I thought, I'd look elsewhere, in The Golden Fish; but I'd have to make sure of both places. The taxi seemed to me to be going at a crawl, its tinny old body clattering miserably. Now and then the meter clicked and another white figure came up behind the red glass.

I said to the driver, "Could you let me have a cigarette?"

"Here," he said, and without looking back handed the packet over his shoulder.

We drove for an eternity. My first fury had vanished, and only shame remained with me. As we got to the first restaurant, I saw my father's car parked neatly in a reserved space.

Somehow I didn't know whether or not this was a relief. But at any rate I knew what to do now. The main thing was to keep calm; I'd greet them casually, sit down at their table. They could think what they liked, but they wouldn't get rid of me, and all their plans would come to nothing. I stood in front of the lighted doorway, and yet I didn't go in. The porter was keeping an eye on me, and I was sure that in a moment he was going to speak to me, but still I stood there and made no move to go in. I willed my hand to take hold of the handle, and it didn't obey me. I implored it to take hold

of the handle, and it only stiffened the more away from it. I turned back, took out the spare key, and started my father's car.

This was probably the best thing to do. If I left them without a car, they couldn't do anything—they couldn't make love in the streets. I swung the car on to the homeward road, picturing my father's face, livid with rage. I could imagine his state of mind. Like all small men, he would take it badly. He might even start to hate Bistra; after all, it was her whim that had landed him in this mess.

As I was leaving Pancharevo, a K.A.T. officer signalled me to stop. My licence was in order, so I started to slow down, and then accelerated again. If I were stopped and identified now, my father would find out who had taken the car. I had no other way left. The car was going at a good speed now, the wet road hissing under the tyres.

I kept a watch behind in the mirror, for I couldn't be sure that the K.A.T. man hadn't a motor-bike with him. The most dangerous thing now would be the single headlight of a motor-bike. The only dangerous thing!

I only slowed down going through Gorublyane. I felt perfectly cool, except that my hands were trembling a little. There was a big car coming in the opposite direction with headlights blazing. I flashed my own heads at him several times, and at last he dipped and out of the darkness emerged a big lorry. I undipped my own lights, and then saw a cyclist right in front of me. I made a despairing effort to avoid him, but the right mudguard smashed him off the road.

I stopped. I was shaking all over. Slowly I opened the door and stepped into the road. Darkness; an enormous silence. Down the road the rear lights of the lorry were receding. I peered around me into that great darkness and saw nothing. Then, somewhere in the distance appeared that single pursuing motor-bike headlight, and at the same moment there rose into the night a shadow, silent and terrible. I couldn't bear the sight of a bloody human face; I couldn't tell what I'd done; I couldn't suffer. Lashed by fear, I ran to the car, started the engine, and pulled away. The powerful engine gathered speed and took me away into the night.

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PAVEL VEZHINOV who was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1914, studied philosophy, began writing in 1932, and is a contributor to many literary periodicals. He has produced short stories, novels and has even written film scripts, some adapted from his works.

A TWO-MINUTE TALE

FENCING MASTER

by GILBERT ROGIN

I LIVE above a fencing academy. It is on the second floor, I am on the third. At first, I couldn't sleep because of the great, alien din which persisted far into the night—clashing weapons, footfalls, the fencing master's splendid and energetic cries: "*Et là. Là. Là. Là.*" Now I am disturbed because for the past few days it has been silent beneath me. Has something happened to the master or his pupils?

I go downstairs and knock at his door. In a moment it is opened by a figure that is wearing a fencing costume and mask.

"Are you the fencing master?" I ask.

"I am," he says and shows me in.

Although I have often seen his pupils on the stairs, this is the first time I have got a look at him. His *salle d'armes*, which was formerly a ballroom and, I have heard, serves as his apartment as well, is bare save for three linoleum *pistes* and very poorly lit. The walls are covered with damask; cherubim and seraphim look down from the ceiling; and several dead, weightless wasps lie alongside the skirting-boards.

"I live above you," I say. "I was concerned because I have not been hearing you giving your lessons."

"My pupils have left me," he says.

"Every one?"

"Fencing has gone out of fashion," he says.

"What will you do, then?"

"What can I do? I am a fencing master. My father was a fencing master. His father was a fencing master. We have always been fencing masters in my family. My father told me that one day fencing would no longer be in fashion. His father told him the same. It is our fate."

"Why didn't you make provision, then?"

"To be a fencing master one must devote every minute of one's life to fencing," he says. "Like all arts, it can always be perfected. The least amount of time spent in another direction can never be recovered, and one is perpetually the lesser fencer for it. Of course, one needs an opponent. What a marvellous thing it would be if one could learn to fence by oneself."

As though he regards the act of putting on his mask a waste of time, he has not removed it. Does he never take it off? I picture him pacing beneath me, waiting in vain for another fencer to appear. He cannot leave or he might irrevocably miss the arrival of the last, ignorant fencer. If he sleeps, it must be only for a few minutes, curled on a *piste*, fully costumed, ready to spring into action.

Several days later, I meet three young men in the street whom I recognise as having been among the fencing master's old pupils. I introduce myself and tell them of my recent visit.

"He was a good teacher, but now he is too old and feeble," says one.

"Do you know that he is blind?" says another. "He won't admit it. He is very proud."

"Actually, he is mad," says the third. "How can you tell a person such a thing?"

"You see why we had to leave him," says the first. "He will not face up to the truth. What could we tell him but that fencing has gone out of fashion? We have all enrolled at another academy. The master there is absolutely first class."

I must move, I must move. How can I continue to live here with the knowledge that he is writhing below me? The only way I can help is to take fencing lessons from him, but that would occupy too much of my time and, besides, I'm sure I would never excel. I must move.

Why do I have to be the one to find him lying among the carcasses of the wasps?

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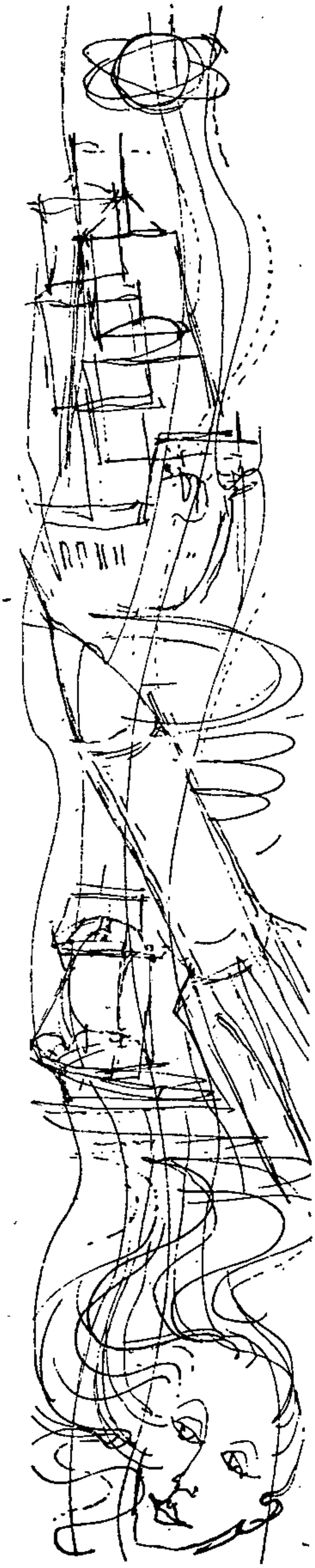

From a modern master of science fiction, a haunting voyage among the stars . . .

Tomorrow is a Million Years

BY J. G. BALLARD

IN the evening the time-winds would blow across the Sea of Dreams, and the silver wreck of the excursion module would loom across the jewelled sand to where Glanville lay in the pavilion by the edge of the reef. During the first week after the crash, when he could barely move his head, he had seen the images of the *Santa Maria* and the *Golden Hind* sailing towards him through the copper sand, the fading light of the sunset illuminating the ornamental casements of the high stern-castles. Later, sitting up in the surgical chair, he had seen the spectral crews of these spectral ships, their dark figures watching him from the quarter-decks. Once, when he could walk again, Glanville went out on to the surface of the lake, his wife guiding his elbow as he hobbled on his stick. Two hundred yards from the module he had suddenly seen an immense ship materialise from

the wreck and move through the sand towards them, its square sails lifted by the time-winds. In the cerise light Glanville recognised the two bow anchors jutting like tusks, the try-works amidships, and the whaling irons and harpoons. Judith held his arm, drawing him back to the pavilion, but Glanville knocked away her hand.

Rolling slowly, the great ship crested silently through the sand, its hull towering above them as if they had been watching from a skiff twenty yards off its starboard bow. As it swept by with a faint sigh of sand, the whisper of the time-winds, Glanville pointed to the three men looking down at them from the quarter-rail, the tallest with stern eyes and a face like biscuit, the second jaunty, the third ruddy and pipe-smoking.

"Can you see them?" Glanville shouted. "Starbuck, Stubb and Flask, the mates of the *Pequod*!" Glanville pointed to the helm, where a wild-eyed old man gazed at the edge of the reef on which he seemed collision-bent. "Ahab . . .!" he cried in warning. But the ship had reached the reef, and then in an instant faded across the clinker-like rocks, its mizzen-sail lit for a last moment by the dying light.

"The *Pequod*! My God, you could see the crew, Ishmael and Tashtego . . . Ahab was there, and the mates, Melville's three momentous men! Did you see them, Judith?"

His wife nodded, helping him on towards the pavilion, her frown hidden in the dusk light. Glanville knew perfectly well that she never saw the spectral ships, but nonetheless she seemed to sense that something vast and strange moved across the sand-lake out of the time-winds. For the moment, she was more interested in making certain that he recovered from the long flight and the absurd accident when the excursion module had crashed on landing.

"But why the *Pequod*?" Glanville asked, as they sat in their chairs on the veranda of the pavilion. He mopped his plump, unshaven face with a flowered handkerchief. "The *Golden Hind* and the *Santa Maria*, yes . . . ships of discovery; Drake circumnavigating the globe has a certain resemblance to ourselves half-crossing the universe—but Crusoe's ship would have been more appropriate, don't you agree?"

"Why?" Judith glanced at the sand inundating the slatted metal floor of the veranda. She filled her glass with soda from the siphon, and then played with the sparkling fluid, watching the bubbles with her severe eyes. "Because we're marooned?"

"No . . ." Irritated by his wife's reply, Glanville turned to face her. Sometimes her phlegmatic attitude annoyed him—she seemed almost to enjoy deflating his mood of optimism, however forced that might be. "What I meant was that Crusoe, like ourselves here, made a new world for himself out of the pieces of the old he brought with him. We can do the same, Judith." He paused, wondering how to re-assert his physical authority, and then said with quiet emphasis; "We're not marooned."

His wife nodded, her long face expressionless. Barely moving her head, she looked up at the night sky visible beyond the edge of the awning. High above them, a single point of light traversed the starless sky, its intermittent beacon punctuating its way towards the northern pole. "No, we're not marooned—not for long, anyway, with that up there. It won't be long at all before Captain Thornwald catches up with us."

Glanville stared into the bottom of his glass. Unlike his wife, he took little pleasure in the sight of the automatic emergency beacon of the control ship broadcasting their position to the universe at large. "He'll catch up with us, all right. That's the luck of the thing. Instead of having him always at our heels we'll finally be free of him for ever. They won't send anyone after Thornwald."

"Perhaps not." Judith tapped the metal table. "But how do you propose to get rid of him—don't tell me you're going to be locked together in mortal combat? At the moment you can hardly move one foot after the other."

Glanville smiled, with an effort ignoring the sarcasm in his wife's voice. Whatever the qualities of skill, shrewdness and even courage, of a kind, that had brought them here, she still regarded him as something of an obscure joke. At times he wondered whether it would have been better to have left her behind. Alone here, on this lost world, he would have had no-one to remind him of his sagging, middle-aged figure, his little indecisions and fantasies. He would have been able to sit back in front of the long sunsets and enjoy the strange poetry of the Sea of Dreams.

However, once he had disposed of Captain Thornwald she might at last take him seriously. "Don't worry, there'll be no mortal combat—we'll let the time-winds blow over him."

Undeterred, Judith said: "You'll let one of your spectral ships run him down? But perhaps he won't see them."

Glanville gazed out at the dark grottoes of the sand-reef that fringed the northern shore of the lake two miles away.

Despite its uniformity—the lake-systems covered the entire planet—the flat perspectives of the landscape fascinated him. "It doesn't matter whether he sees them or not. By the way, the *Pequod* this evening . . . it's a pity you missed Ahab. They were all there, exactly as Melville described them in *Moby Dick*."

His wife stood up, as if aware that he might begin one of his rhapsodies again. She brushed away the white sand that lay like lace across the blue brocade of her gown. "I hope you're right. Perhaps you'll see the *Flying Dutchman* next."

Distracted by his thoughts, Glanville watched her tall figure move away across the gradient of the beach, following the tide-line formed by the sand blown off the lake's surface. The *Flying Dutchman*? A curious remark. By coming to this remote planet they themselves would lose seven years of their lives by time-dilation if they ever chose to return home, by coincidence the period that elapsed while the condemned Dutchman roved the seas . . . Every seven years he would come ashore, free to stay there only if he found the love of a faithful woman.

Was he himself the Dutchman? Perhaps, in a remote sense. Or Thornwald? He and Judith had met during the preliminary inquiries and, incredible though it seemed, there might have been something between them—it was difficult to believe that Thornwald would have pursued them this far, sacrificing all hopes of seniority and promotion, over a minor emigration infringement. The bacterial scattering might be serious on some planets, but they had restricted themselves to arid worlds on an empty edge of the universe.

Glanville looked out at the wreck of the excursion module. For a moment there was a glimmer of royals and top-gallants, as if the entire *Cutty Sark* was about to disgorge itself from the sand. This strange phenomenon, a consequence of the time-sickness brought on by the vast distances of interstellar space, had revealed itself more and more during their long flight. The farther they penetrated into deep space, the greater the nostalgia of the human mind and its eagerness to transform any man-made objects, such as the space-ships in which they travelled, into their archaic forbears. Judith, for some reason, had been immune, but Glanville had seen a succession of extraordinary visions, fragments of the myths and dreams of the Earth's past, reborn out of the dead lakes and fossil seas of the alien worlds.

Judith, of course, not only lacked all imagination but felt

no sense of guilt—Glanville's crime, the memory of which he had almost completely repressed, was no responsibility of hers, man and wife though they might be. Besides, the failures of which she silently accused him every day were those of character, more serious in her eyes than embezzlement, grand larceny or even murder. It was precisely this that made possible his plan to deal once and for all with Captain Thornwald.

Three weeks later, when Thornwald arrived, Glanville had recovered completely from the accident. From the top of the sand-reef overhanging the western edge of the lake he watched the police captain's capsule land two hundred yards from the pavilion. Judith stood under the awning on the veranda, one hand raised to ward off the dust kicked up by the retro-jets. She had never questioned Glanville's strategy for dealing with Thornwald, but now and then he had noticed her glancing upwards at the beacon of the control ship, as if calculating the number of days it would take Thornwald to catch up with them. Glanville was surprised by her patience. Once, a week before Thornwald arrived, he almost challenged her to say whether she really believed he would be able to outwit the police captain. By a curious irony, he realised that she probably did—but if so, why did she still despise him?

As the starboard hatch of the capsule fell back, Glanville stood up on the edge of the reef and began to wave with both arms. He made his way down the side of the reef, then jumped the last five feet to the lake floor and ran across to the capsule. "Thornwald! Captain, it's good to see you!"

Framed within the steel collar of his suit, the policeman's tired face looked up at Glanville through the open hatch. He stood up with an effort and accepted Glanville's hand, then climbed down on to the ground. Careful not to turn his back on Glanville, he unzipped his suit and glanced quickly at the pavilion and the wreck of the excursion module.

Glanville strolled to and fro around him. Thornwald's cautious manner, the hand near the weapon in his holster, for some reason amused him. "Captain, you made a superb landing, beautiful marksmanship—getting here at all, for that matter. You saw the beacon, I suppose, but even so..." When Thornwald was about to speak, Glanville rattled on: "No, of course I didn't leave it on deliberately—damn it, we actually crashed! Can you imagine it, after coming all this way—very nearly broke our necks. Luckily, Judith was all

right, not a scratch on her. She'll be glad to see you, Captain."

Thornwald nodded slowly, his eyes following Glanville's pudgy, sweating figure as it roved about the capsule. A tall, stooped man with a tough, pessimistic face and all the wariness of a long-serving policeman, he seemed somehow unsettled by Glanville's manic gaiety.

Glanville pointed to the pavilion. "Come on, we'll have lunch, you must be tired out." He gestured at the sand-lake and the blank sky. "Nothing much here, I know, but it's restful. After a few days—"

"Glanville!" Thornwald stopped. Face set, he put a hand out as if to touch Glanville's shoulder. "You realise why I'm here?"

"Of course, Captain." Glanville gave him an easy smile. "For heaven's sake, stop looking so serious. I'm not going to escape. There's nowhere to go."

"As long as you realise that." Thornwald plodded forward through the top surface of fine sand, his feet placed carefully as if testing the validity of this planet with its euphoric tenant. "You can have something to eat, then we'll get ready to go back."

"If you like, Captain. Still, there's no desperate hurry. Seven years here and back, what difference will a few hours or even days make? All those whipper-snappers you left behind you in the department will be chief commissioners now; I wouldn't be in too much of a hurry. Besides, the emigration laws may even have been changed..."

Thornwald nodded dourly. Glanville was about to introduce him to Judith, standing quietly on the veranda twenty feet from him, but suddenly Thornwald stopped and glanced across the lake, as if searching for an invisible marksman hidden among the reefs.

"All right?" Glanville asked. Changing the pitch and tempo of his voice, he remarked quietly: "I call it the Sea of Dreams. We're a long way from home, Captain, remember that. There are strange visions here at sunset. Keep your back turned on them." He waved at Judith, who was watching them approach with pursed lips. "Captain Thornwald, my dear. Rescue at last."

"Of a kind." She faced Thornwald who stood beside Glanville, as if hesitating to enter the pavilion. "I hope you feel all this is necessary, Captain. Revenge is a poor motive for justice."

Glanville cleared his throat. "Well, yes, my dear, but... Come on, Captain, sit down, we'll have a drink. Judith, could you—?"

After a pause she nodded and went into the pavilion.

Glanville made a temporising gesture. "A difficult moment, Captain. But as you know, Judith was always rather headstrong."

Thornwald nodded, watching Glanville as the latter drew the chairs around the table. He pointed to the wreck of the excursion module. "How badly was it damaged? We'll have a look at it later."

"A waste of time, Captain. It's a complete write-off."

Thornwald scrutinised the wreck. "Even so, I'll want to decontaminate it before we leave."

"Isn't that pointless?—no-one will ever come here. The whole planet is dead. Anyway, there's a good deal of fuel in the tanks; if you short a circuit with your sprays the whole thing could go up." Glanville looked around impatiently. "Where are those drinks, Judith is..."

He started to stand up, and found Thornwald following him to the door of the pavilion. "It's all right, Captain."

Thornwald leaned stolidly on the door. He looked down at Glanville's plump, sweating face. "Let me help you."

Glanville shrugged and beckoned him forward, but then stopped. "Captain, for heaven's sake! If I wanted to escape I wouldn't have been waiting for you here. Believe me, I haven't got a gun hidden away in a whisky bottle or something—I just don't want a scene between you and Judith."

Thornwald nodded, then waited in the doorway. When Glanville returned with the tray he went back to his seat, eyes searching the pavilion and the surrounding beach as if looking for a missing element in a puzzle. "Glanville, I have to prefer charges against you—you're aware what you face when you get back?"

Glanville shrugged. "Of course. But after all, the offence was comparatively trivial, wasn't it?" He reached for Thornwald's bulky flight-suit which was spread across the veranda-rail. "Let me move this out of the sun. Where's Judith gone?"

As Thornwald glanced at the door of the pavilion Glanville reached down to the steel pencil in the right knee of the suit. He withdrew it from the slot, then deliberately dropped it to the metal floor.

"What's this?" he asked. "A torch?" His thumb pushed

back the nozzle and then moved quickly to the spring tab.

"Don't press that!" Thornwald was on his feet. "It's a radio reflector, you'll fill the place with—" He reached across the table and tried to grasp it from Glanville, then flung up his forearm to protect his face.

A blinding jet of vaporised aluminium suddenly erupted from the nozzle in Glanville's hand, gushing out like a fire-work. Within two or three seconds its spangled cloud filled the veranda, painting the walls and ceiling. Thornwald kicked aside the table and buried his face in his hands, his hair and forehead covered with the silver paint.

Glanville backed to the steps, flecks of the paint spattering his arms and chest, hosing the jet directly at the policeman. He tossed the cannister on to the floor, where its last spurts gusted out into the sunlight, swept up by the convection currents like a swarm of fireflies. Then, head down, Glanville turned and ran towards the edge of the sand-reef fifty yards away.

Two hours later, as he crouched deep in the grottoes of the reef on the west shore of the lake, Glanville watched with amusement as Thornwald's silver-painted figure stepped out of the pavilion into the sunlight. The cloud of vapour above the pavilion had settled, and the drab grey panels of the roof and sides were now a brilliant aluminised silver, shining in the sunlight like a temple. Framed in the doorway was Judith, watching as Thornwald walked slowly towards his capsule. Apart from the two clear handprints across his face, his entire body was covered with the aluminium particles. His hair glittered in the sunlight like silver foil.

"Glanville . . .!" Thornwald's voice, slightly querulous, echoed in the galleries of the reef. The flap of his holster was open, but the weapon still lay within its sheath, and Glanville guessed that he had no intention of trying to track him through the galleries and corridors of the reef. The columns of fused sand could barely support their own weight; every few hours there would be a dull eruption as one or other of the great pillar-systems collapsed into a cloud of dust.

Grinning to himself, Glanville watched Thornwald glance back at the pavilion. Evidently intrigued by this duel between the two men, Judith had sat down on the veranda, watching like some mediæval lady at a tourney.

The police captain moved towards the reef, his legs stiff and awkward, as if self-conscious of his glittering form. Chortling, Glanville scraped the sand from the curved roof

over his head and rubbed it into the flecks of silver paint on his sleeves and trousers. As he drank from the flask of water he had hidden in the reef three days earlier, he glanced at his watch. It was nearly three o'clock—within four hours phantoms would move across the sand-lake. He patted the parcel wrapped in grey plastic sheeting on the ledge beside him.

At seven o'clock the time-winds began to blow across the Sea of Dreams. As the sun fell away behind the western ridges, the long shadows of the sand-reefs crossed the lake-floor, dimming the quartz-veins as if closing off a maze of secret pathways.

Crouched at the foot of the reef, Glanville edged along the beach, his sand-smeared figure barely visible in the darkness. Four hundred yards away, Thornwald sat alone on the veranda of the pavilion, his silver figure illuminated in the last cerise rays of the sun. Watching him across the lake-bed, Glanville assumed that already the time-winds were moving towards him, carrying strange images of ships and phantom seas, perhaps of mermaids and hallucinatory monsters. Thornwald sat stiffly in his chair, one hand on the rail in front of him.

Glanville moved along the beach, picking his way between the veins of frosted quartz. As the wreck of the excursion module and the smaller capsule nearby came between himself and the pavilion, he began to see the faint outlines of a low-hulled ship, a schooner or brigantine, with its sails reefed, as if waiting at anchor in some pirate lagoon. Ignoring it, Glanville crept into a shallow fault that crossed the lake, its floor some three feet below the surrounding surface. Catching his breath, he undid the parcel, then carried the object inside it under one arm as he set off towards the glimmering wreck of the module.

Twenty minutes later Glanville stepped out from his vantage point behind the excursion module. Around him rode the spectral hulks of two square-sailed ships, their bows dipping through the warm sand. Intent on the pavilion ahead of him, where the silver figure of Thornwald had stood up like an electrified ghost, Glanville stepped through the translucent image of an anchor-cable that curved down into the surface of the lake in front of him. Holding the object he had taken from the parcel above his head like a lantern, he walked steadily towards the pavilion.

The hulls of the ships rode silently at their anchors behind

him as he reached the edge of the lake. Thirty yards away, the silver paint around the pavilion speckled the sand with a sheen of false moonlight, but the remainder of the beach and lake were in a profound darkness. As he walked the last yards to the pavilion with a slow rhythmic stride, Glanville could see clearly Thornwald's tall figure pressed against the wall of the veranda, his appalled face, in the shape of his own hands, staring at the apparition in front of him. As Glanville reached the steps Thornwald made a passive gesture at him, one hand raised towards the pistol lying on the table.

Quickly, Glanville threw aside the object he had carried with him. He seized the pistol before Thornwald could move, then whispered, more to himself than to Thornwald: "Strange seas, Captain, I warned you..." He crouched down and began to back away along the veranda, the pistol levelled at Thornwald's chest.

Then the door on his left opened and before he could move the translucent figure of his wife stepped from the interior of the pavilion and knocked the weapon from his hand.

He turned to her angrily, then shouted at the headless spectre that stepped through him and strode off towards the dark ships moored in the centre of the lake.

Two hours after dawn the next morning Captain Thornwald finished his preparations for departure. In the last minutes he stood on the veranda, gazing out at the even sunlight over the empty lake as he wiped away the last traces of the aluminium paint with a solvent sponge. He looked down at the seated figure of Glanville tied to the chair by the table. Despite the events of the previous night, Glanville now seemed composed and relaxed, a trace even of humour playing about his soft mouth.

Something about this bizarre amiability made Thornwald shudder. He secured the pistol in his holster—another evening by this insane lake and he would be pointing it at his own head.

"Captain..." Glanville glanced at him with docile eyes, then shrugged his fat shoulders inside the ropes. "When are you going to untie these? We'll be leaving soon."

Thornwald threw the sponge on to the silver sand below the pavilion. "*I'll* be going soon, Glanville. You're staying here." When Glanville began to protest, he said: "I don't think there's much point in your leaving. As you said, you've built your own little world here."

"But . . ." Glanville searched the captain's face. "Frankly, Thornwald, I can't understand you. Why did you come here in the first place, then? Where's Judith, by the way? She's around here somewhere."

Thornwald paused, steeling himself against the name and the memory of the previous night. "Yes, she's around here, all right." As if testing some unconscious element of Glanville's memory, he said clearly: "She's in the module, as a matter of fact."

"The module?" Glanville pulled at his ropes, then squinted over his shoulder into the sunlight. "But I told her not to go there. When's she coming back?"

"She'll be back, don't worry. This evening, I imagine, when the time-winds blow, though I don't want to be here when she comes. This sea of yours has bad dreams, Glanville."

"What do you mean?"

Thornwald walked across the veranda. "Glanville, have you any idea why I'm here, why I've hunted you all this way?"

"God only knows—something to do with the emigration laws."

"Emigration laws?" Thornwald shook his head. "Any charges there would be minor." After a pause, he said: "Murder, Glanville."

Glanville looked up with real surprise. "Murder? You're out of your mind! Of whom, for heaven's sake?"

Thornwald patted the raw skin around his chin. The pale image of his hands still clung to his face. "Of your wife."

"Judith? But she's here, you idiot! You saw her yourself when you arrived!"

"*You* saw her, Glanville. I didn't. But I realised that you'd brought her here with you when you started playing her part, using that mincing crazy voice of yours. You weren't very keen on my going out to the module. Then, last night, you brought something from it for me."

Thornwald walked across the veranda, averting his eyes from the wreck of the module. He remembered the insane vision he had seen the previous evening as he sat watching for Glanville, waiting for this madman who had absconded with the body of his murdered wife. The time-winds had carried across to him the image of a spectral ship whose rotting timbers had formed a strange portcullis in the evening sun—a dungeon-grate. Then, suddenly, he had seen a terrifying apparition walking across this sea of blood towards him, the

nightmare commander of this ship of Hell, a tall woman with the slow rhythmic stride of his own requiem. *'Her locks were yellow as gold . . . the nightmare life-in-death was she, who thicks man's blood with cold.'* Aghast at the sight of Judith's head on this lamia, he had barely recognised Glanville, her mad Mariner, bearing her head like a wild lantern before he snatched the pistol.

Glanville flexed his shoulders against the ropes. "Captain, I don't know about Judith . . . she's not too happy here, and we've never got on with just ourselves for company. I'd like to come with you."

"I'm sorry, Glanville, there's not much point—you're in the right place here."

"But, Captain, aren't you exceeding your authority? If there is a murder charge . . ."

"Not 'captain,' Glanville—'commissioner.' I was promoted before I left, and that gives me absolute discretion in these cases. I think this planet is remote enough; no-one's likely to come here and disturb you."

He went over to Glanville and looked down at him, then took a clasp knife from his pocket and laid it on the table. "You should be able to get a hand around that if you stand up. Goodbye, Glanville, I'll leave you here in your gilded hell."

"But, Thornwald . . . Commissioner!" Glanville swung himself round in the chair. "Where's Judith? Call her."

Thornwald glanced back across the sunlight. "I can't, Glanville. But you'll see her soon. This evening, when the time-winds blow, they'll bring her back to you, a dead woman from this dead sea."

He set off towards the capsule across the jewelled sand.

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J. G. BALLARD is one of a handful of science fiction authors who have attracted widespread critical attention. Born in China, of English parents, in 1930, he returned to England in 1946. He attended Cambridge, where in 1951 he won an annual short story competition, and later he became a copywriter and a scriptwriter. He is the author of three novels, *The Drowned World*, *The Drought*, and *The Crystal World*, and two collections of short stories.

choice ballard

From "The Drowned World," a vision of a future London, turned into a jungle by the increase in the sun's heat, and submerged beneath the rising waters of melting ice-caps...

SCREECHING like a dispossessed banshee, a large hammer-nosed bat soared straight out of one of the narrow inlets off the creek and swerved straight towards the cutter. Its sonar confused by the labyrinth of giant webs spun across the inlet by the colonies of wolf spiders, it missed the wire hood above Kerans' head by only a few feet, and then sailed away along the line of submerged office blocks, gliding in and out of the huge sail-like fronds of the fern-trees sprouting from their roofs. Suddenly, as it passed one of the projecting cornices, a motionless stone-headed creature snapped out and plucked the bat from the air. There was a brief piercing squawk and Kerans caught a glimpse of the crushed wings clamped in the lizard's jaws. Then the reptile shrank back invisibly among the foliage.

All the way down the creek, perched in the windows of the office blocks and department stores, the iguanas watched them go past, their hard frozen heads jerking stiffly. They launched themselves into the wake of the cutter, snapping at the insects dislodged from the air-weed and rotting logs, then swam through the windows and clambered up the staircases to their former vantage points, piled three deep across each other. Without the reptiles, the lagoons and the creeks of office blocks half-submerged in the immense heat would have had a strange dream-like beauty, but the iguanas and the basilisks brought the fantasy down to earth. As their seats in the one-time boardrooms indicated, the reptiles had taken over the city. Once again they were the dominant form of life.

Looking up at the ancient impassive faces, Kerans could understand the curious fear they roused, re-kindling archaic memories of the terrifying jungles of the Paleocene, when the reptiles had gone down before the emergent mammals, and sense the implacable hatred one zoological class feels towards another that usurps it.

J. G. Ballard, The Drowned World

A Modern Rake's Progress

BY ROY DEWAR

..until I heard them talking about the importance of image

..so, I got myself a flat haircut, dark glasses and some dead geary gear..

...checked on the week's 'In' names...

..and chatted up the birds like I was a vodka-swilling, unemployed writer..

and, boy, did it do things for me! I'm no longer a filing clerk..

I'm a vodka-swilling, unemployed writer...

THE DEVIL and Democracy

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

"YOUR Lowness is always Left," said Belphagor, absent-mindedly taking the needle-sharp little soul of a TV producer out of his lapel and starting to pick his fangs. "But I think you ought to see them."

"I will not," snarled the Devil. "I've been master here since before the Creation. D'you think I'm going to let this crawling little worm of a fifth-class sinner come down here and unionise Hell? I will not see them. I will not deal with them. I will not recognise them. And if that picket isn't off Hell's gates inside ten minutes I'm going to—" and he lashed his tail so violently that he swept half a hundredweight of kitchen cob souls straight out of the soul scuttle into the fire. They sputtered damply and began to smoulder with a rather nasty smell.

"I asked you for bright household nuts," said the Devil in a low, dangerous voice.

Belphagor shrugged. "That's all there is. And when they're gone—" He shrugged again. "It's going to be extremely cold." He stuck the TV producer in the corner of his mouth in a rather vulgar manner, and spread out his hands in front of the smoky mass of bankers, politicians and arm-chair generals. "If the electricians join in—" As he said it the bulbs began to dim and fade in the great crystal chandeliers. The photographers' models, boutique-owners, cardsharps and motor-car salesmen inside the bulbs stopped glowing white, turned dull red, faded and vanished in the general gloom. Only the fire still burned an unhealthy blue at one end of the vast throne room.

"I really think you ought to see them," Belphagor said.

"After all, just seeing them needn't commit you to anything. And it might get the lights back on."

Three hours later they were facing the union organisers across the black basalt conference table in the third circle of the executive suite. And a nastier group, thought the Devil, he had never seen since the Fall. Imps, trolls, fiends, illiterate demons; not a decently-educated devil in the whole pompous bunch. Why am I doing it? the Devil thought. Why don't I just retire to the country and forget all this? Lilith would love it. She's been on at me for centuries—

But Belphagor was knocking on the table. "We are delighted to welcome you, gentlemen. If you have a spokesman?"

From the depths of an armchair a fat, slubberly, oily-faced imp wearing a dirty boiler-suit clambered to his hind paws. Wiping the back of a fat, hairy front paw across his snout he said, in an atrocious accent, "Our spokesman is Brother Grunge," and sticking his paw into the pocket of his boiler-suit pulled out a raucous, shouting, gesticulating little soul carrying a picket's banner in one fist and a red bandana handkerchief in the other.

"*Brothers!*" screamed Grunge, obviously continuing from the point where he had been stuffed into the imp's pocket a few minutes earlier: "I've been fighting the employer class for forty-seven years and I know them like a dog knows fleas. They're yellow, I tell you, yellow all through—"

The slubberly imp tapped Grunge on the top of his head with a horny claw. "This *is* the employer."

He himself had the decency to blush

He had transformed himself into the sleekest salesman ever seen on the quiet roads of Cork . . .

Illustrations by Pete

a dark shade of black, but Grunge was unabashed: "An exploiter if ever I saw one," he shouted. "We haven't come here to bargain. We've come here to tell you. We've got solidarity! We've got brotherhood! And we're going to stick this out till Hell freezes over. You can lock us out. You can starve us. But you'll never beat us. We're going to have justice here or you can sell this plant for a pig-farm. Isn't that right, brothers? Am I speaking for us all?"

The row of ungainly imps nodded and growled agreement.

The Devil lurched unsteadily to his feet. From the moment that Grunge had first appeared, bilious green and sweating, out of the dirty pocket of the leading imp's boiler-suit, the Devil had begun to look extremely reactionary, and the effect of Grunge's opening remarks had been far from beneficial. He had begun to swell and change colour in a marked manner and by the time the imps had signified their agreement with Grunge, the Devil looked dangerously near to having a stroke.

"Tell them to go away," he whispered, clawing at the collar of his reptile-green suit, which had grown extremely tight. "The meeting is over. Get me my pills."

"But you can't!" screamed the leading imp. "We have to discuss—"

"I don't," said the Devil, holding on to the gold dragon's head door-handle for support.

"Fascist!" screamed Grunge. "Close the plant! Pull out the maintenance men! One for all and all for one, eh, brothers?"

The Devil felt his way out of the room and as Belphagor followed him, Grunge began leading the imps in the first bars of the *Red Flag*. Five seconds later all the lights went out. Outside the palace crowds of working-class imps were standing about in sullen idleness, staring up at the now-darkened windows of the conference room. Grunge, waving his red bandana, appeared on a window-sill, put there by the leader-imp.

"Brothers!" screamed Grunge. "Lay down your forks! The day has come! Justice! Liberty! Freedom! Let imps and sinners stand shoulder to shoulder in the fight for democracy! The bosses have divided us! Exploited us! Told us our interests are opposed! Give them the lie, brothers! Let sinner and imp clasp hands in deathless brotherhood. Let the fires go out. Unity! Equality! I proclaim the eternal liberty of the Imps' and Sinners' Soviet Republic. This isn't a strike any longer, comrades, this is War, this is Revolution, this is the March of History!"

An ugly roar of approval rose from several thousand scaly throats, counterpointed by the shrill piping of an even larger number of souls just liberated from the furnaces.

"It's the end of everything," whimpered Belphagor. "If only you'd given them the ninety-six-hour week when they first asked for it—"

"Rubbish," said the Devil, who had taken three of his heart pills and was both looking and feeling very much stronger. "All we need is strategy. Inside a week I'll have them begging for mercy."

They slipped out of the back door of the palace disguised as scullery imps. Grunge was still shouting. Belphagor shuddered. Sinners were lolling around at their ease. Younger imps were playing hopscotch or blind-man's-buff. Older imps were playing cards on top of the cooling gridirons, or lying asleep in the still-warm ashes of the furnaces. Not a punishment was in progress. Not a sinner was screaming. The chute from the upper regions gaped emptily over its empty bin.

"Look," whispered Belphagor, awed by a sight that no devil had seen since Eve bit the apple. "It's empty. The top-side staff have struck as well!" A shiver ran through his tail.

"We're going to fix Grunge," said the Devil, restraining himself with super-devilish control from kicking the night-lights out of an unwholesome-looking stoker-imp who was playing three-handed stud with two souls from the fourth circle. "We're going to send him back. Up top."

Belphagor stared at his master open-mouthed. "Up top! Back? But you can't! Why—"

The first Law of Damnation learned by every imp and juvenile devil in the third grade forbade it. It was unthinkable. *What comes down can't go up. Q.E.D.—Quod est Damnatum.*

"Watch me," said the Devil. "I haven't built this place down to see it taken over by a bunch of stokers. Stick close behind me and shut your snout."

They threaded their way through the crowd towards one of the lesser gates. Already, things were taking an even uglier turn. In the distance they saw a senior devil surrounded by jeering imps who were forcing him to sing the *Red Flag*. On the far side of the palace there was a sound of breaking glass as if windows were being smashed.

"They'll be looting soon," whispered Belphagor. "Oughtn't we—"

"Let them," snarled the Devil. "Tomorrow is another

century." They slipped out of the unguarded gate, threw off their repulsive and humiliating disguises behind a convenient bush, and spread their wings.

"Where are we going?" Belphagor said timidly.

"Belmuck," said the Devil. "Rapesprocket's parish."

An instant later, if you calculate such things by earthly time, the Devil and his henchman landed in a small cave in the fair and wholesome parish of Belmuck. As you'll know, if you are at all versed in infernal theology, every Christian parish—and for all I know to the contrary, every pagan parish as well—has a Devil's hole, through which, a moment or so after death, the souls of the unhappy damned are tipped to their eternal doom by the resident imp of the parish, the infernal counterpart of the parish priest.

The resident imp of Belmuck was Rapesprocket and a lazier, more unsatisfactory, more inefficient one it would be hard to find in the length and breadth of Christendom. In centuries no parishioner of Belmuck had been tipped down the hole. Even on the infamous occasion when the two O'Shaughnessys had killed each other over the widow Hegarty's cow, Rapesprocket had let them both slip out of his hands simply by being asleep at the crucial moment. Only family connections and the almost feudal conservatism of Hell had allowed Rapesprocket to retain his care of souls. Now, the Devil was extremely glad of it.

"Look at him," he said to Belphagor with grim satisfaction. "As usual."

And indeed, Rapesprocket's condition was all too usual, disgraceful as it was. An empty poteen jar lay under his head in the guise of a pillow. Another, almost as empty, lay in the crook of his fat and hairy arm. A clay pipe drooped from the slack and rubbery lips of his sack-like mouth, and out of the black vents of his snout came the soft snores of a far-too-contented sleep. Rapesprocket was both drunk and incapable.

"Shall I kick his head in?" Belphagor said hopefully.

The Devil restrained him. "Not yet. Not for another twenty-four hours. First, we want a soul. Any one will do, so long as we get it in a nice state of mortal sin at the appropriate moment. Then we get Rapesprocket to throw it down the hole." He was clearing away a thick tangle of cob-webs from the mouth of the hole as he was talking. "Even Rapesprocket ought to be able to do that if we put it into his hand first."

Belphagor gaped at him. "What good will that do?"

"My dear Belphagor," said the Devil wearily, "there is a strike on at the bottom—agreed? No souls are going down. No resident imp will agree to send one down because of the strike. Am I making myself clear? Except Rapesprocket, who, as you see, is obviously incapable of hearing of the strike, let alone joining it. Therefore, if we can induce Rapesprocket to send down a soul, this will be white-legging. Am I going too fast for you? Down below they will refuse to process the soul, or even to receive it, and there will therefore be a discrepancy in the books between us below, and—" he coughed gently as he always did when he mentioned the Opposition, "—them above."

Belphagor still gaped.

The Devil closed his eyes and thoroughly unpleasant sparks came out of his ears and turned into fireflies. "Someone give me patience," he murmured. "We go back down and negotiate. We agree to absolutely anything they want. And at a certain moment this matter of Rapesprocket's white-legging is bound to come up. They'll demand the scab-production soul be sent back up top. And—" he coughed gently "—the Opposition will have to agree in principle that we be permitted to send back one soul up the chute. *They* don't want to see us close down any more than we do. And when I've got that permission—" his eyes glittered ferociously and he swelled so large that he suddenly filled the cave and hurt himself badly on a knob of rock "—then I send one soul back up the chute the very next instant. But it won't be Rapesprocket's little capture. It will be Grunge." He clicked two clawed fingers together like a pistol shot. "Let's see how long the strike lasts without *him*."

And, followed by Belphagor in an admiring silence, he set off down the hillside towards the innocently-sleeping village of Belmuck.

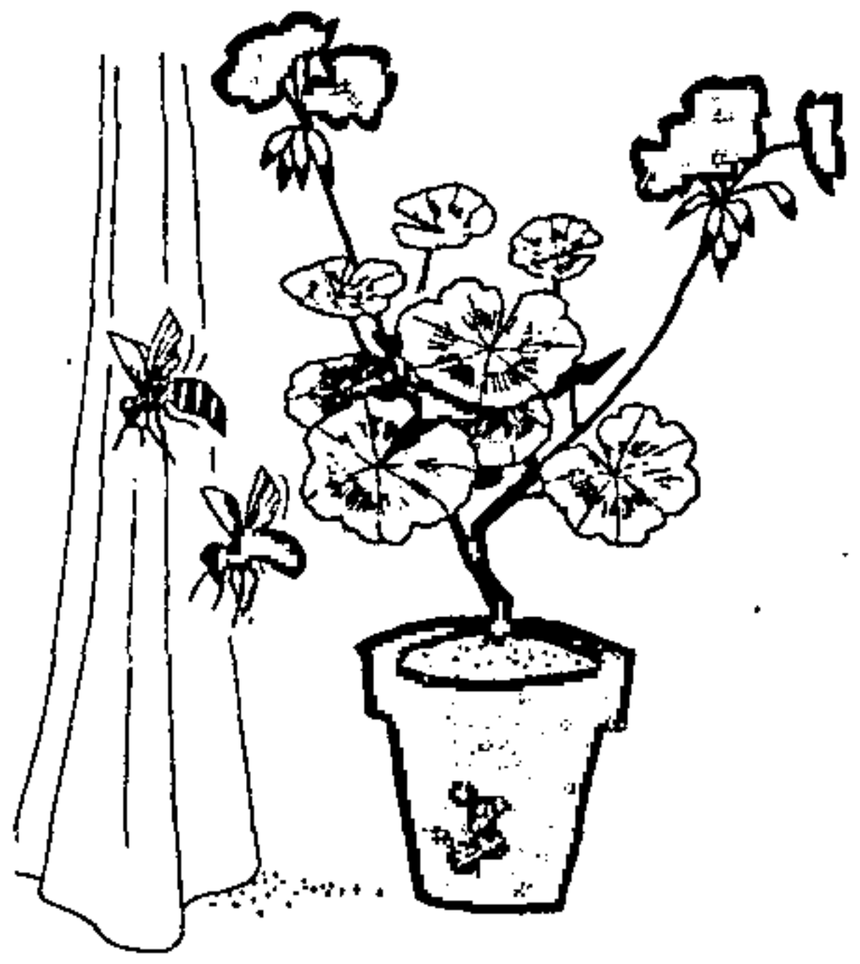
Unfortunately for our two fiends Belmuck believed in "early to bed" if not in "early to rise" and, on reaching the village, the Devil found not a light lighting nor a soul stirring nor even a mouse nibbling cheese, and he and Belphagor had to occupy the next nine hours by disturbing and tormenting the sleep of any sleeper who caught their impatient and devilish fancy.

Even old Concepta Hennigan, who was a hundred and six, had such dreams as startled her out of her white woolly bed

socks and she woke up with such an appetite for breakfast and such a bright, hopeful eye as astonished her great-grand-daughter, Rose Ann McCarthy, into nearly spilling the tea on her great-grandmother's coverlet.

"Watch what you're doing, gerrul," quavered the old crone but, instead of telling her to be glad of any class of breakfast at all, even with tea in the saucer, Rose Ann simply smiled delightfully and emptied the spilled drops into the geranium pot on the window-sill.

"Yer'll kill me geramium!" screeched Concepta, and Rose Ann merely patted the white pillow into its proper shape behind her great-grandmother's nearly bald head, set the tray on her lap, and buttered the home-made bread for her before cutting it into little, delicious morsels for the old woman's convenience.



The Devil, who was watching all this sickening display of virtuous patience in the guise of a bluebottle perched on the geranium, ground his front feelers together and obliterated a fruit-fly who got in the way. To see virtue in daily use was bad enough, but to see it in such a toothsome shape as Rose Ann McCarthy was infinitely worse. In fact it was intolerable, and then and there, almost forgetting the main purpose of the visit, the Devil determined that the soul he had come for should be the soul of Rose Ann and no other.

"I'll have her," he snarled, "I'll have her inside the day." And taking off from the geranium he buzzed round her dark and luscious head like an undertaker measuring a prospective customer—although such a customer would surely have melted the heart of any undertaker and made him regret his mourn-ful calling.

Rose Ann's hair shone like brown silk of the darkest shade, thick and curling, with the warmth of the sun and the beauty of the moon in its deepest shadows. Her teeth were like white hawthorn flowers behind the red promise of her mouth, and the blush and flush on her cheeks was like the warm down of a ripe peach. And this would be only the beginning of the short description of the heads and chapters of her beauty. The soft throat of her, with hollows under the rounded chin

where a bird could nestle; the sweet breast like modesty itself under the starched and pleated linen of her blouse—for what so beautiful as modesty in a young girl?; the supple promise of her waist that would scarcely fill a man's two hands unless he squeezed them tight—and who wouldn't, unless he was a Carmelite? . . . All this that I'm bashfully describing is still merely the outermost revelation of her charms. Let you watch her walking and guess at the hidden mechanism of her beauty, and I warrant that if you hadn't already, why then, you'd fall down in the same fit of passionate attachment as had taken half the boys in the village—the other half being freed from it only by emigration.

But however passionate your attachment, it probably wouldn't be half so passionate as that of Desmond Sorley Boy O'Shaughnessy, the postman's son. He had only to think of Rose Ann to go into cantrips and calamities of passion, and if he got more than two glimpses of her in any one day he had to steady himself that night with enough poteen to slaughter an ox or he couldn't have slept. Indeed it was in a slightly poteen-induced sleep that the Devil had found him, and through his tortured dreams of longing and love had got wind of the apparently impregnable state of Rose Ann's virtue.

"Get rid of that nasty fly!" screeched Concepta, and obediently Rose Ann picked up a tightly-rolled copy of the *Cork Examiner* kept precisely for such purposes, and caught the Devil a terrible smack on the left side of the head.

Thirty seconds later, and about thirty feet from Concepta's open window, the Devil came to his senses in the middle of the road and narrowly avoided being obliterated by a donkey.

"Yerrah damn," said Belphagor in the shape of a wasp, alighting beside his master. "That was a formidable belt you got from that lassie. I'd leave her alone if I were you."

Most of what the Devil said in reply is completely unprintable, even with stars and asterisks, and all that can be safely repeated here are the last two words—"Follow me"—as the noisome pair flew off to meditate and scheme in the little shed behind Concepta's cottage.

"Now," said the Devil, when they were comfortably settled. "I mean to have that girl if it takes me till Doomsday, or at least till this midnight, and if you're unable to assist in bringing about this simple consummation, I suggest that you don't bother to return below with me, because if you do, by the red hot horns of my throne I'll make you wish you'd stayed bleating and harping with the—ahem—Opposition."

Belphagor polished his sting on a wooden seat in a rebellious manner, and eyed his master with something close to exasperation.

"Why do you always want things the difficult way? Why not the old woman? Why not Shoneen James, the publican down the road? I've been watching him water the whiskey. He'd be a pushover."

"It's Rose Ann I want," buzzed the Devil, "and Rose Ann I'll have. And I think I know how. Come back out to the road."

And back they flew and a mile out of the village, where down a quiet boreen they transformed themselves in less than an instant into two of the sleekest, most persuasive travelling salesmen that ever travelled the quiet roads of West Cork. And if you don't know the district, then you must simply accept my word for it that that's saying a great deal. Belphagor wore a camel-hair overcoat in spite of the warm weather, a green velours hat with a narrow, curly brim, a pink bow-tie with chocolate stripes and a shirt to match, and pearl cuff-links just peeping out of the sleeves of his tasteful green suit. A pair of pink fluorescent socks and dark blue suède shoes completed the genteel ensemble.

But if Belphagor knocked the eye out of the day with his tasteful splendour, the Devil put it back again. A pale yellow suit with the faintest white checks in it would have made any onlooker realise at once that whatever else he was, he was a gentleman, by the sheer masterful cut of his double-breasted waistcoat with its sharp lapels and little gilt buttons. His socks were lavender blue and his shoes were black and white, glistening like a wet heifer in the sunlight. His jacket was of the Italian cut, with cuffs to the sleeves and four buttons down the front. He wore a pink rosebud in his lapel, and a tie of purple silk with a large gold stick-pin to match his waistcoat buttons. His hat was purple to match his cravat and surrounded with a narrow white silk ribbon with a gold buckle. You might well have described him as dripping with splendour, and an ugly glisten of jealousy crept into Belphagor's eye at the sight of him.

"Now for a motor car," said the Devil, rubbing his hands —and there, shining with chromium plate and glory, was a new American roadster of the most opulent appearance; white leather upholstery, salmon-pink body-work, radio aerials, fog lights, automatic transmission, 384 brake horsepower, a cruising speed of ninety-seven mph, a built-in cocktail bar, a record

player with stereophonic sound, power steering, and a collapsible rubber dinghy in the boot—not that the Devil cared about that.

In our villains got, with the Devil driving, up the boreen with them, round into the main road—main is it, God help it, nineteen feet wide at the best, but yerrah, who'd pay the rates to widen it—up the main road then, and coming to a whispering rest outside old Concepta's cottage.

Out hopped the Devil and knocked on the little rose-covered door. "Musha," said he, when Rose Ann came and opened it. "Glad I am to be the bearer of such good tidings to the likes of you, Rose Ann McCarthy, asthorre." For he was under the impression that this was how everyone in Ireland talked, no real Irishman having condescended to go below to him for some considerable time.

Rose Ann gaped at him, as well she might, what with his language and his Dublin accent and his grandeur and the sight of Belphagor lifting his green velours hat and grimacing politely at her over the Devil's shoulder. "It *is* Miss Rose Ann that I have the honour and pleasure of addressing, isn't it?" said the Devil anxiously.

"Why yes, sir," trembled Rose, "but—"

"Say no more," said the Devil. "Am I right in thinking that you are a constant user of Sinko soap—" a question to which he already knew the answer, having flown through the kitchen that morning "—and have you by a lucky chance an open packet of that incomparable soap powder in your kitchen at this moment? For if you have—"

"Why, yes," said Rose, a tiny flutter of cupidity disturbing the innocence of her mind. "As a matter of fact I have." And on twinkling feet and dazzling ankles she flew to get it. Little and slight the start of the slope!

So back she came with her bright blue packet of Sinko and the Devil threw up his hands in delight. "Now for our question," he cried. "Tell me, what is the name of the capital city of England?"

A faint shadow crossed the perfect surface of Rose Ann's forehead as she strained to think. "L-o-n-d—" whispered Belphagor, mouthing and eyeing her from behind his master's back.

"Why—London!" cried Rose Ann, as if she had immediately thought of it herself. Oh sorrow! Oh alas, alas, that second step, that steepening of the slippery path! Oh poor lost innocence!

"Brains as well as beauty," cried both the Devil and Belphagor, "what a happy combination!" And the Devil snapped his fingers. "Belphy, my dear chap, get Miss Rose Ann McCarthy her splendid Sinko Summer Dress with ruched pleats and pannier pockets, and don't forget to slip that crisp new five-pound note into one of them."

Belphagor sped back to the car where, on the back seat in its transparent plastic-wardrobe-carrying-bag, lay the beautiful dress, little embroidered flowers on the hem and the crispest, most wearable blue and white linen bodice and skirt that a girl could desire.

"Here, my dear!" cried the Devil, lifting his hat once more. "Well may you wear it, and if a stranger may make so bold, may you soon wear it in—" he dropped his musical voice an octave "—in agreeable company. At the dance tonight in the next parish, perhaps? Some of that five pounds expended on potable enjoyments for your aged great-grandmother would make her sleep so soundly that she would never note your absence, why, not even if it was prolonged until midnight." But whether he said that aloud or merely whispered it into Rose Ann's receptive mind it would be beyond the wit of man to say.

Suffice it to say that, tripping down later in the morning to Shoneen James' public house, Rose Ann bought her great-grandmother a medicine bottle full of watered whiskey, and allowed it to transpire in passing that she had a new dress and that if anyone was of a mind to ask her, she might even consider accompanying him to the dance in the next parish that same night. And all this she said over the counter to Shoneen James in the full knowledge that, as she could see by the mirror behind and to one side of Shoneen James' head, Desmond Sorley Boy O'Shaughnessy was drowning his desires in the public bar next door to the off-licence department where she was transacting her business. Oh wirra, how far and fast the innocent can fall when once they lose their footing! Deception on deception. Oh, alas!

The Devil, again in the unsightly guise of a bluebottle sipping spilt beer on the counter, almost choked with satisfaction.

"I'll have her," he spluttered, "I'll have her surely." And round the corner he buzzed to fill the mind of Desmond Sorley Boy with unspeakable thoughts.

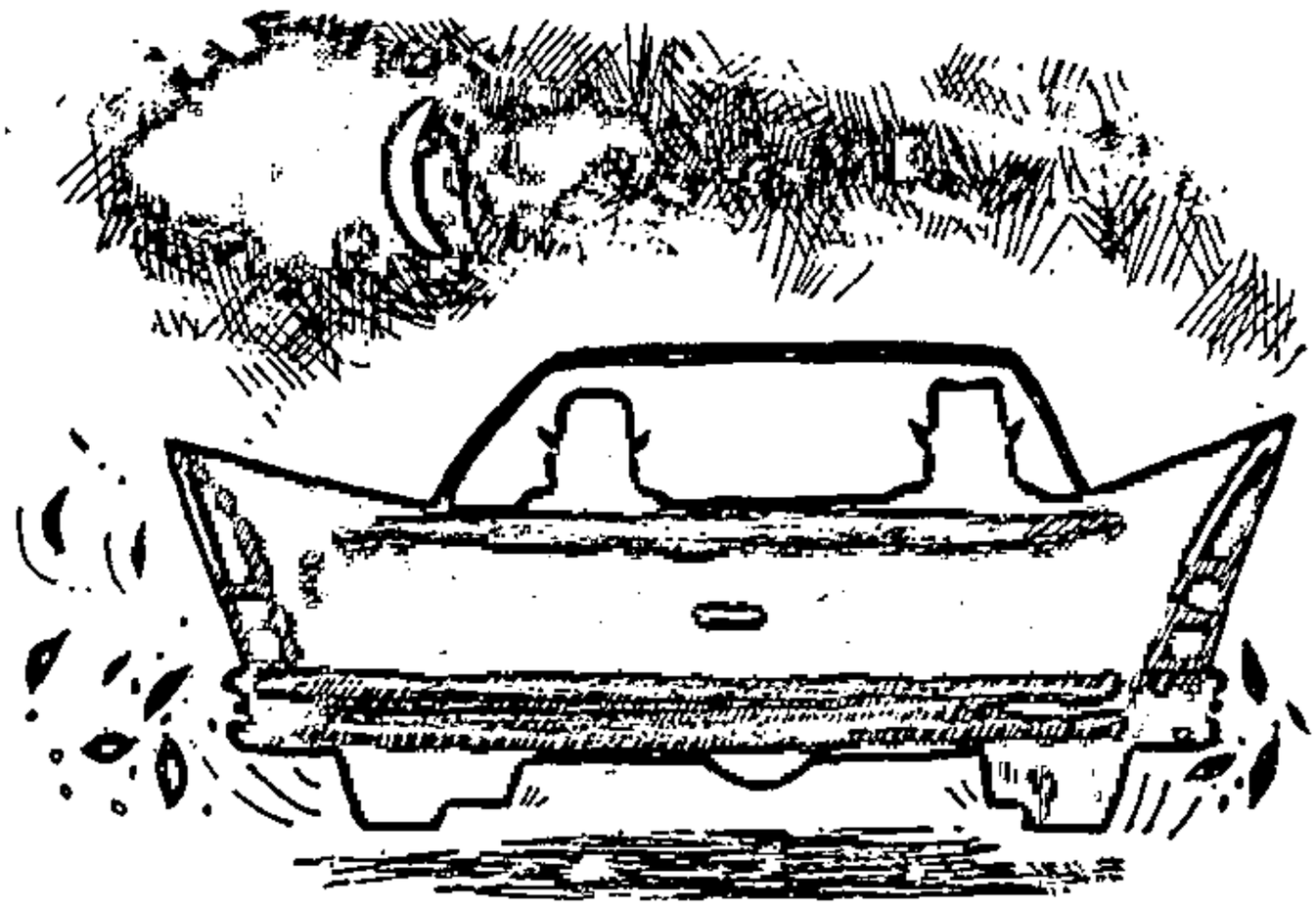
And all the rest of that day till night-fall, he and Belphagor left neither of those two unfortunates in peace and tranquillity,

but first one and then the other had displayed to them the shameful joys of dalliance, until putting the two of them together on the same yard of road leading to the dance-hall that night was like putting a magnet against a needle.

They weren't two steps up the road but they were holding hands. And they weren't ten steps farther but Desmond Sorley Boy was slyly and covetously slipping his arm round Rose Ann's waist and finding the resistance to it no more than the merest formality. At the same time, his mind and mouth were filled with words of a passionate persuasiveness such as Rose Ann had never heard in her life and he himself was unaware that he was capable of framing—as no more he was, the poor thick, the Devil sitting on his shoulder all the while and whispering them into his ear one after the other, blarney upon blarney, enough to melt stone, let alone the heart of a girl in a new summer dress with flowers on the hem and the change of a five-pound note tucked safe in a post office savings-account.

And all the while wasn't Belphagor, in the shape and form of a money-spider, perched on her warm and delicately-rounded shoulder, whispering to *her*? "What's an arm round the waist after what you see in the films and on the television?" he was whispering. And then, as they came to the shady trees hanging over the road a quarter of a mile farther on: "Suppose he was to try and kiss you?"—and the hot flushes and blushes nearly scalded his spidery foot as he trod on her bending neck. And with Rose Ann near fainting with the persuasion she was receiving from two sides, and Desmond Sorley Boy near losing his footing on the stones of the road with unbridled passion—yerrah damn, is it any wonder that inside another ten steps he was kissing her like a starving man with a dish of pig's feet, and she—oh, how can a decent man write down the whole of it?—the girl wasn't resisting him at all!

Everything she'd ever been told—by her great-grandmother, by her grandmother on her father's side (her grandmother on her mother's side being nothing much and dying at sixty-three of an accident), by her mother, by her aunt, the good nun Mother Mary of the Angels, by Father O'Byrne in confessions and retreats, and by the good Bishop of Cork at her confirmation—all, all of it might have been so much smoke on the wind for all it did for her, and they weren't halfway to the dance. Holy Heaven, if it had been coming *back* from the dance it might have been another thing, but going *to* the dance,



not even getting there—where in the world are girls coming to at all, I ask you?

They weren't half nor a quarter of the way to that unhappy occasion of sin—the Belcladder Parish Friday-Night Dance, with a late extension till two a.m. of a Saturday morning—when their feet inclined of their own accord, it seemed, down a little side turning, and from the side turning into a gateway, and from the gateway into a field full of the softest meadow grass and the most fragrant daisies and buttercups and cowslips; and from walking slower and slower, with their arms entwined and their lips meeting, didn't they . . . But human pen refuses to continue. Let the Devil watch—as indeed he did. You and I can only avert our shocked eyes and withdraw into some more decent place. And having withdrawn, neither you nor I can know or say exactly what happened during the next hour or so in that misfortunate meadow, or why at the end of the time the pair of them came out looking shame-faced and downcast. But I fear the worst.

And the Devil was sure of it. "We have her," he cried to Belphagor, the pair of them resuming their disguise as salesmen, behind the wheel of their powerful car. "Not a second to lose." And, throwing the car into one of its powerful gears, the Devil hurtled down the boreen at seventy miles an hour with the lights out, or at least out until the last second. The unhappy lovers stumbled into the little lane through the gateway to be suddenly blinded as the ferocious headlights pierced the dark. A scream, a shadow, the thump of a bumper against yielding humanity and all was done.

Leaving Belphagor to park the car, the Devil leapt out of his seat and his human shape, grasped the fluttering soul of the just-murdered Rose Ann McCarthy and, crushing her in

his cruel grip, flew off to where Rapesprocket still lay stretched and snoring beside the long-unused Devil's hole.

"Let me go!" cried poor Rose Ann, or rather her poor, tarnished but still-beautiful soul. "Let me go! I am innocent!" But alas she lied, or the Devil himself for all his dreadful powers could never have matched his noisome strength against her weak innocence.

She lied indeed, and with a swift swing of his long arm the Devil pitched her into the gaped and snoring mouth of Rapesprocket, waking him up in a choking paroxysm of coughing.

"Garrrh, wugggh, grummppff," Rapesprocket gargled, and poor Rose all but disappeared down his black throat into his unspeakable interior. But he coughed her out on to the palm of his paw and stared at her as if he had never seen a condemned soul before. Which, as a matter of fact, he hadn't—at least for several hundred years.

"Whar? Who? Wharramarrer?" he said, breathing poteen fumes all over the poor trembling sinner.

"Throw her down the hole," shouted the Devil, beginning to get impatient.

"The hole?" gaped Rapesprocket, staring round in alcoholic befuddlement. "Wha' hole? Whug? Oh, the hole." And then, even more befuddled, "Who said tha'?"

The Devil began to dance with frustration. "Throw her down!" he screamed, for to achieve his fell and ultimate purpose against Grunge it was not enough that Rose, or any other sinner, should merely descend the chute into the waiting bin below. She must be sent down by an officially-accredited resident imp, holding his residence and parish by feudal enfeoffment from his Satanic Majesty, and now, by the progress of democracy, unionised by Grunge. In other words, by an imp who ought to be on strike and wasn't. In short a white-leg.

"Throw her down," mumbled Rapesprocket dizzily. "Ummm, ahh." He peered round him, lumbered unsteadily to his webbed feet and searched for the black and gaping hole beside him. So unsteadily, in fact, that he nearly fell down it himself.

"Help!" cried Rose Ann to the surely not indifferent but still helpless sky. "Save me!"

Rapesprocket sniggered and belched while folding her into a convenient shape for throwing, and prepared to fling her down the chute. The Devil smiled. Belphagor, who had joined him, clasped his dreadful claws in triumph. Up went

Rapesprocket's unsteady arm. One white hand struggled between his gripping claws to appeal uselessly to the lost world of life and hope.

"Down she goes," snarled the Devil.

"In with you," cried Rapesprocket, and hurled her into the entrance of the hole.

...When out of the hole came pouring imps and demons, trolls and greasy, unshaven fiends, carrying banners with clumsily-written messages scrawled on them: *Down With the Devil-class*; *Death to the Fascist Monster Satan*; *Angels Go Home*; *To Hell With Sanctity*; *Universal Fraternity of Imps and Sinners*; *Sinners of the World, Unite*; *You Have Nothing to Lose but Your Pains*; and similarly subversive slogans.

One of the upsurging marchers saw Rose Ann's poor soul flying towards him in a downward curve, swung his banner with a practised ease that told of far too many hours wasted playing rounders behind the furnaces when he ought to have been tormenting sinners in front of them, and batted her straight back over Rapesprocket's head, over the Devil's head, over Belphagor's head and, although that was no part of his impish intention, right back into the boreen where a minute or so before she had been knocked senseless and apparently life-less by the Devil's car.

Rose Ann opened her eyes to find Desmond Sorley Boy bending over her and murmuring the most extraordinary promises of future virtue and abstention from alcohol and other matters if only she would open them, and it is an amazing proof of the resilient qualities of the human frame, and particularly of the young female human frame that, apart from extensive bruising and a resultant lameness that confined her to her bed for a penitential month, she suffered no lasting ill-effects from that night's adventures. Unless her eventual and in fact somewhat hastily-arranged marriage with Sorley Boy could be considered an ill-effect. She certainly seemed quite reasonably contented the last time I saw her.

As for the Devil and Belphagor, I am really not at liberty to say what has happened to them—these matters being *sub judice* and even *sub rosa*. But I would advise you that if two extremely well-dressed men should come to your door asking do you by any chance have a packet of Sinko soap in your kitchen, you should close the door sharply in their ingratiating faces and have nothing whatsoever to do with them. Nothing.

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WE human beings really are getting too big for our plastic goloshes. We've ferreted out so much and invented so many things that our heads are expanding like the universe. We know everything about the world we live in. And what we don't know, we'll soon find out. I wonder.

Take thunder and lightning. It drove our ancestors to worship; it merely drives us indoors. And evil spirits . . . . what was that you said? *What* evil spirits? I don't blame you; I would have said the same thing before Leo Austin came back to Trimington.

Trimington is a big industrial city sprawling under a mantle of soot. But drive through the city centre, head south-west along the Spatchley Road and you'll find a memorial to—well, let me choose my words so as not to offend the sceptics—to forces beyond our knowledge and understanding. This memorial is the city side of the ring road: a car park. That's all, a car park. Mind you, Trimington police, fire brigade and surveyor's department would have a fit if you even hinted at "unknown forces," let alone evil spirits. Leo and I know

because we tried telling them. But that car park wasn't there until Leo turned up with his tape-recorder.

Most people think of a tape-recorder as a plaything. Press a button and yesterday's voice becomes today's reality. The dead recite poetry, young men are children again. Marvellous. But it has sinister potentialities—like so many of our inventions.

Leo earns his living in an off-beat way. He supplies film companies and broadcasting organisations with sound effects. He goes all over the world with a portable machine, capturing anything from a bullfight to a Kurdish wedding.

On this occasion he was just back from darkest, steamiest Africa. Standing on Trimington station, I reflected that it was like meeting a Big Game hunter or an explorer, only better. Back in my office—where we always go in search of privacy on his first night home—I would be able to *live* his adventures through his tapes. Be there with him.

But he no sooner stepped on to the platform than I saw a change in him. He looked subdued, even embittered. He shook hands perfunctorily as though he were thinking of something else.

"Anything wrong?" I asked as we drove up Spatchley Road.

He shrugged. "I've had a bit of a shock, that's all. The sort that makes you do some re-thinking."

"About what?" I asked.

"About life. Dick," he added earnestly, "you've known me a long time. Do you think I would lie about something that happened to me?"

I stared at him. "What would be the point?" I asked. "In any case, your tapes are your witness."

"Not this time," he said bitterly. "You're going to have to take my word for the crucial part of it."

My office was on the third floor of a ten-storey block made up of concrete slabs pinned to a steel superstructure. A dozen Georgian buildings had been knocked down to make room for it—and so far, mine was the only floor to be let.

As soon as we arrived, Leo began setting up his machine. That surprised me, too, because over the years we've established a kind of ritual. First, he lights his pipe; then he unrolls a map and shows me his itinerary. But this time he couldn't wait to find a spool of tape, put it on the spindle and thread it.

"This is going to be sheer masochism," he said. "I'll be re-creating the profoundest experience of my life—and my

biggest failure. It'll be hard not to blub." He tugged angrily at his pointed beard as he spoke. I lit a cigar and waited.

"I went to Africa," Leo started off, "to get some on-the-spot recordings of voodoo, witch doctors, tribal magic, fertility- and healing-rites, that sort of stuff. At first, it was about as eventful as recording quacks at a fair-ground. The same old yelling and singing, the same old mumbo-jumbo, much of it tainted by sophistication that has seeped in from the outside world. But in the Congo, it began to be different. I met *untainted* belief. It showed itself in people's expressions, in the way they gestured and danced. I knew I was getting closer to the real thing."

I knew what he meant. Once, in Kenya, I'd seen an isolated tribe writhing and stamping in a rain-making ceremony, and no matter how blasé you might feel about it in your mind, you couldn't remain unmoved. Those people *believed* the rain would come, and if it didn't . . . well, they'd go on believing just the same.

"The Sambuti tribe," said Leo, "live pretty deep in the jungle. A missionary told me about them. Their witch doctor, Shuwayao, he said, had a reputation for conjuring up Zdarda, the spirit of courage, or, more literally, of violence. It appears that the Sambuti territory is threatened not only by other tribes, but also by Europeans—film cameramen, British and French on safari, anthropologists and naturalists . . . and old Shuwayao took a dim view of it. He wanted to keep the tribe uncontaminated by white men's ideas. He wanted to woo them away from the habit of posing for pictures and doing tribal dances in return for a box of brightly-coloured combs or a few bags of salt. He hoped that Zdarda would enter into their souls so that the next television crew that turned up would be met by blow pipes instead of outstretched hands.

"Despite the risk," Leo went on, "I decided to try to tape-record Shuwayao in action. I knew the difficulties. I would have to keep out of sight—and that would reduce my chances of success. But if I succeeded, I would have something unique and valuable."

At last Leo began filling his pipe, and I noticed that his fingers left wet imprints on the bowl.

"By the time I reached Sambuti, I was well bitten by mosquitoes. My three porters stayed a couple of miles back from the compound, scared stiff, and I had to hump my equipment the rest of the way. I realised, of course, that it might

prove a wasted effort. Shuwayao mightn't do his stuff that night, or the next, or even at all. But I had to find out.

"My luck was in. I guessed as much when I saw a wood pyre in the middle of the compound. Excitement emanated from the huts. Lying on my face, peering through the undergrowth, I made out the strutting, arrogant figure of Shuwayao. There was no mistaking him—his eyes were set deep in his skull and he looked like a black Mussolini.

"I got as near as I dared, then set up my equipment. I was using a directional mike, the most sensitive I've got, and my Mark Four Hamburg. And all the time insects dive-bombed my head and cannoned off into the gathering darkness.

"Time plodded on. I began to think that nothing would ever happen. Then the fire was lit. Through the leaves I saw Shuwayao's face lit up by the flames. It was a death mask, except for the concentration under the closed lids. The natives squatted around him, tense and expectant. And then, as if Shuwayao had touched a button, the invocation began."

Leo pressed the start button on his recorder. The tape revolved. A booming voice came out of the loudspeaker. A phrase, a formula, was repeated again and again. The tribesmen joined in, but Shuwayao's voice dominated. His words beat into my ears like a drum. I could visualise the scene: the flickering firelight, dark figures writhing in front of their witch doctor, eyes turned up to the sky from which Zdarda would surely come.

It went on like that for about ten minutes. Then the chanting stopped abruptly. The silence was more shattering even than that persistent voice. I could sense the expectancy. It was underlined by the faint hum of insects, the crackle of undergrowth. There was perspiration on my forehead. Leo sat hunched-over the machine, his unlighted pipe in his mouth, tobacco hanging like creeper over the side of the bowl.

And then a click. Leo threw his pipe angrily on to the desk.

"You hear that?" he cried. "Like a damn fool I switched off—and threw away the recording scoop of the century!"

He took the spool off the machine. I watched him in silence, uneasily aware that something intangible had been disturbed. In me and outside me. Like an explosion you sensed but didn't hear.

"I'm doing now what I did in the jungle," said Leo fiercely. "I removed the tape, just like this, put it away and closed the case." The catches snapped back. "And why not? Zdarda was a myth. Why sit like an idiot waiting for the non-existent

to materialise? Better to get back to my porters before those tribesmen started having hallucinations."

Leo locked up his machine.

"We civilised folk," he went on, "are so damn sure of what life is all about. What we see, we believe. What we are told has to be documented, annotated and attested by fifty witnesses. That's why I don't expect you to believe what I swear is true —that a wind came from nowhere, knocking me flat on my back. That trees crashed down on the compound while, fifty yards away, not a leaf stirred. That amid the wailing and screams of terror, I felt—yes, *felt*—something trample in the path of the wind like a huge, untameable animal."

He picked up his tape-recorder and made for the door.

"Only it isn't on the tape, old boy. So it doesn't bloody well count."

We went down in the lift. A thought nibbled at my mind. "Leo, how long after the rite did Zdarda manifest himself?"

He frowned as if to ward off cross-examination. "About five minutes, possibly longer. Why?"

We got into my car. "Have you played that tape before?" I asked.

He shook his head. I switched on the ignition. I was in a hurry to get away. Leo misread my thoughts.

"I'm sorry," he snapped, "if you think I'm mad. I know the story is uncorroborated, but—"

"Who says it's uncorroborated?" I glanced at my watch. "Whatever was done has been done again, hasn't it?"

He opened his mouth to ask what I meant; then he got the message.

We were fifty yards from my office when I *knew* that Leo had told the truth. The wind came from nowhere, blowing us into the kerb. But we were clear of the vortex. I braked sharply, turned and looked through the rear window. The office block, which we had just left, shuddered like a ship buffeted by a cyclone . . . shook and bellied outwards, crumbling as those Regency buildings had crumbled under the labourers' picks.

Despite what Leo and I said, the architect of that office block (poor chap) was shunned by his profession as an incompetent idiot. There were articles about false stresses and miscalculated strains. But for me, anyway, the car park which remained after the rubble was cleared, is proof of what I said at the beginning—that we don't know everything.

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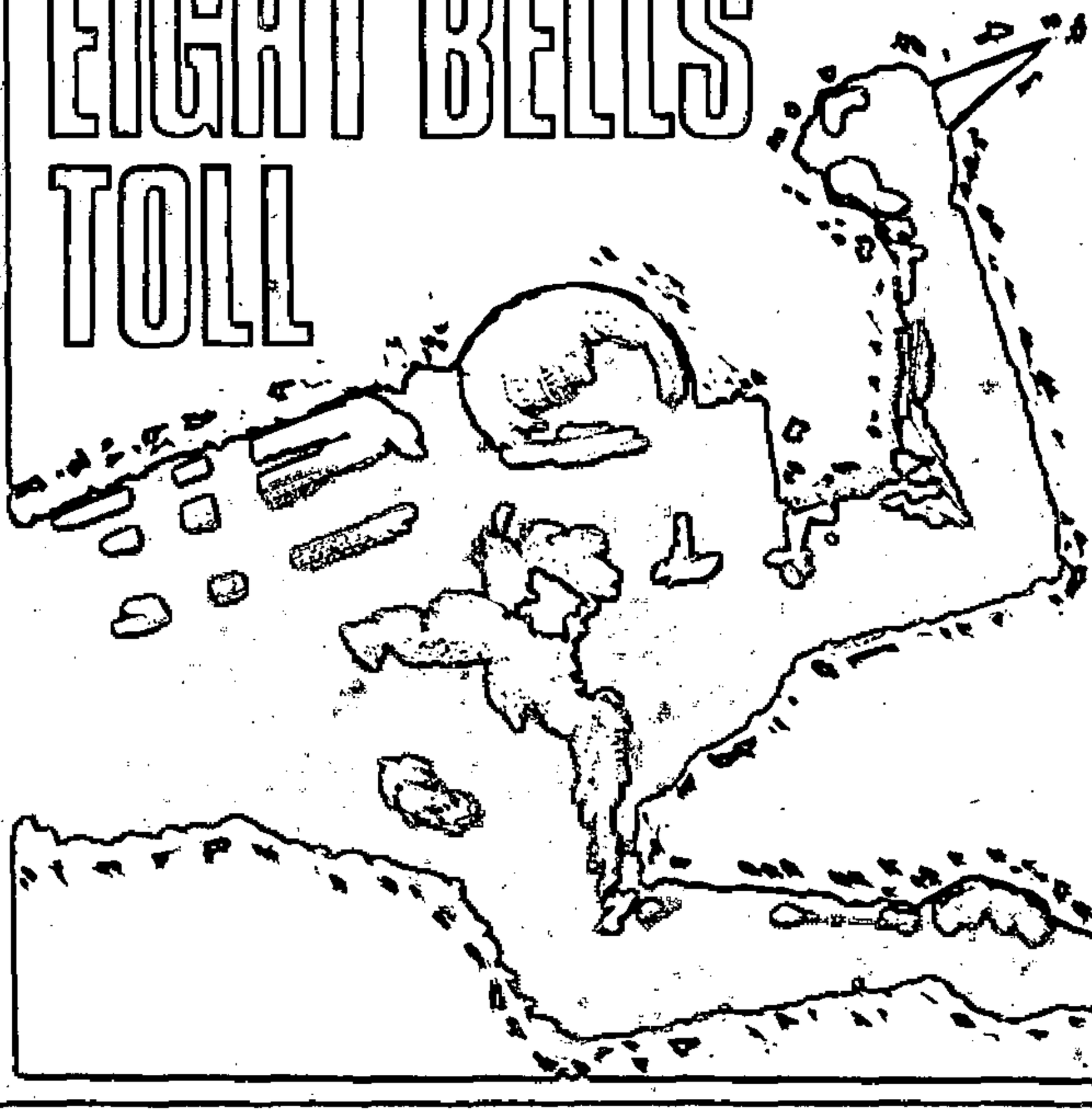
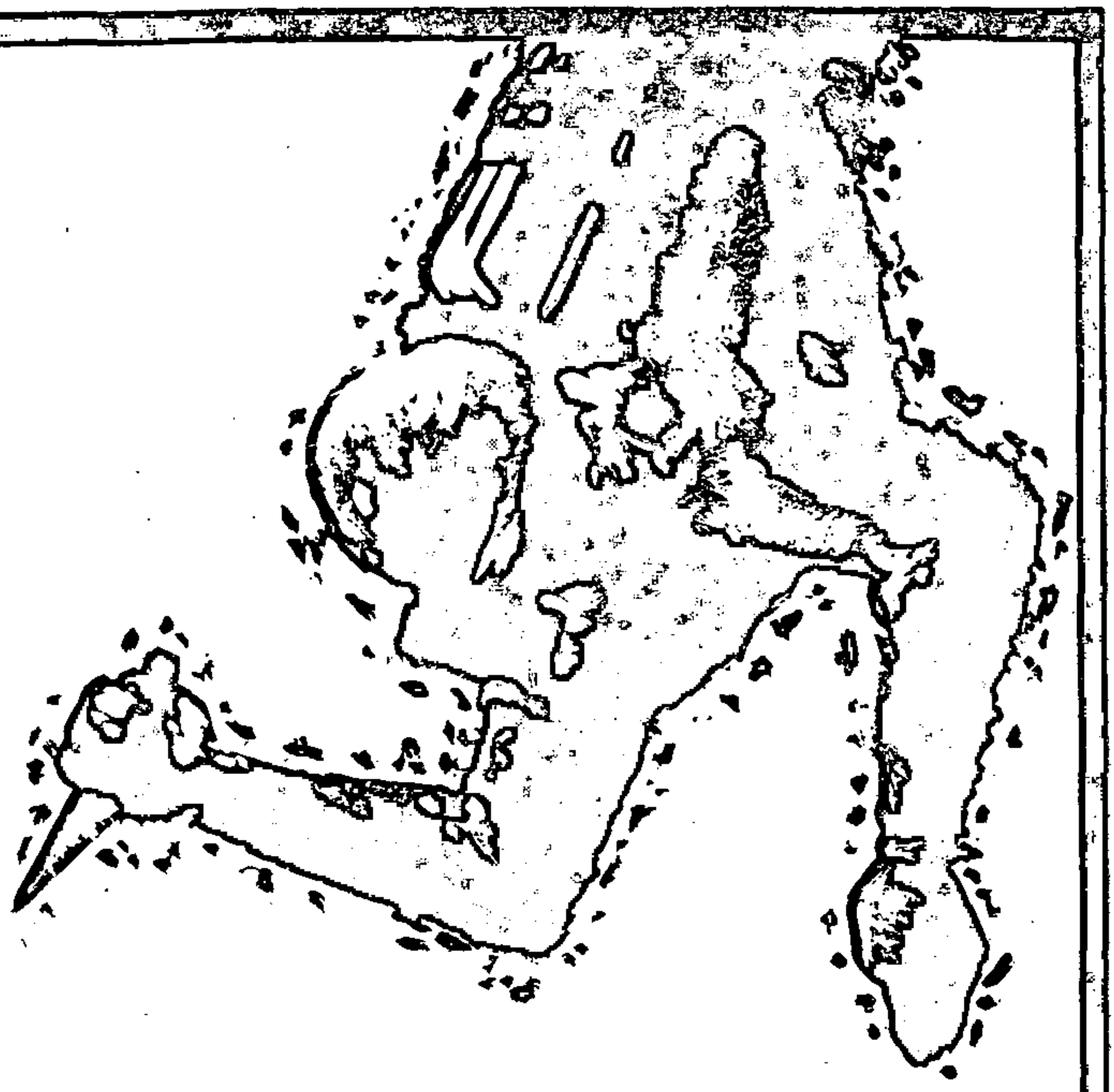
BY ALISTAIR MACLEAN

Beginning Argosy's exclusive serialisation
of the explosive new thriller by the author
of 'THE GUNS OF NAVARONE' and 'H.M.S. ULYSSES.'
Meet Alistair MacLean's latest hero,
Philip Calvert, of British Naval Intelligence

WHEN EIGHT BELLS TOLL





THE Peacemaker Colt has now been in production, without change in design, for almost a century. It is the oldest hand-gun in the world, the most famous and, if efficiency in its designated task of maiming and killing be taken as criterion of its worth, then it is also probably the best hand-gun ever made. When a Peacemaker's bullet hits you in the leg, you don't curse, step into shelter, roll and light a cigarette one-handed then smartly shoot your assailant between the eyes. When a Peacemaker bullet hits your leg you fall to the ground unconscious, and if it hits

the thigh-bone and you are lucky enough to survive the torn arteries and shock, then you will never walk again without crutches. And so I stood absolutely motionless, not breathing, for the Peacemaker Colt that had prompted this unpleasant train of thought was pointed directly at my right thigh.

The hand that held the Colt, the hand that lay so lightly yet purposefully on the radio-operator's table, was the steadiest hand I'd ever seen. It was literally motionless. I could see the hand very clearly. The light in the radio cabin was very dim, the rheostat of the angled table-lamp had been turned down until only a faint pool of yellow fell on the scratched metal of the table, cutting the arm off at the cuff, but the hand was very clear. Rock-steady, the gun could have lain no quieter in the marbled hand of a statue. Beyond the pool of light I could half sense, half see, the dark outline of a figure leaning back against the bulkhead, head slightly tilted to one side, the white gleam of unwinking eyes under the peak of a hat. My eyes went back to the hand. The angle of the Colt hadn't varied by a fraction of a degree. Unconsciously, almost, I braced my right leg to meet the impending shock.

Very slowly, very steadily, I raised both hands, palms outwards, until they were level with my shoulders. The careful deliberation was so that the nervously inclined wouldn't be deceived into thinking that I was contemplating anything ridiculous, like resistance. It was probably a pretty superfluous precaution as the man behind that immobile pistol didn't seem to have any nerves and the last thought I had in my head was that of resistance. The sun was long down but the faint red after-glow of sunset still loomed on the north-west horizon and I was perfectly silhouetted against it through the cabin doorway. The man behind the desk probably had his left hand on the rheostat switch ready to turn it up and blind me at an instant's notice.

The man with the gun said nothing and did nothing. He remained completely still. I could see the white blur of teeth now. The gleaming eyes stared unwinkingly at me. The smile, the head cocked slightly to one side, the negligent relaxation of the body—the aura in that tiny cabin of a brooding and sardonic menace was so heavy as to be almost palpable. There was something evil, something frighteningly unnatural and wrong and forbidding in the man's stillness and silence and cold-blooded cat-and-mouse indifference. I could smell death in the air.

"I think we're both making a mistake," I said. "Well, you

are. Maybe we're both on the same side." The words came with difficulty but they sounded all right to me, just as I wanted them to sound, low and calm and soothing. Maybe he was a nut-case. Humour him. Anything. Just stay alive. I nodded to the stool at the front corner of his desk. "It's been a hard day. Okay if we sit and talk? I'll keep my hands high, I promise you."

The total reaction I got was nil.

I smiled what I hoped was a friendly and encouraging smile and moved slowly towards the stool. I faced him all the time, the cordial smile making my face ache and the hands even higher than before.

I made it with both still intact. I sat down, hands still high, and started breathing again. The Colt was as motionless as ever. The barrel hadn't followed me as I'd moved across the cabin, it was still pointing rigidly at the spot where I'd been standing ten seconds earlier. I moved fast going for that gun-hand, but it was no break-neck dive.

I eat all the right foods, take plenty of exercise and, even although no insurance company in the world will look at me, their medical men would pass me any time, but even so I couldn't tear that gun away. The hand that had looked like marble felt like marble, only colder. I'd smelled death all right, but the old man hadn't been hanging around with his scythe at the ready, he'd been and gone and left this lifeless shell behind him. I straightened, checked that the windows were curtained, closed the door noiselessly, locked it as quietly and switched on the overhead light.

I'm not a doctor, far less a good one, and all I could tell about the man behind the desk was that he was stiff as a man frozen to death in a Siberian winter. He'd been gone for hours. He wore four gold bands on his sleeves, so that would seem to make him the captain. The captain in the radio cabin. Captains are seldom found in the radio cabin and never behind the desk. He was slumped back in his chair, his head to one side, the back of it resting against a jacket hanging from a hook on the bulkhead, the side of it against a wall cabinet. *Rigor mortis* kept him in that position, but he should have slipped to the floor or at least slumped forward on to the table before *rigor mortis* had set in.

There were no outward signs of violence that I could see. I tried to pull him upright but he wouldn't budge. I tried harder; I heard the sound of cloth ripping, then suddenly he was upright, then fallen over to the left of the table, the right

arm pivoting stiffly around and upwards, the Colt an accusing finger pointing at heaven.

I knew now how he had died and why he hadn't fallen forward before. He'd been killed by a weapon that projected from his spinal column, between maybe the sixth and seventh vertebræ, I couldn't be sure, and the handle of this weapon had caught in the pocket of the jacket on the bulkhead and held him there.

My job was one that had brought me into contact with a fair number of people who had died from a fair assortment of unnatural causes, but this was the first time I'd ever seen a man who had been killed by a chisel. The blade was imbedded to a depth of at least four inches and, even allowing for an edge honed to a razor sharpness, it had taken a man as powerful as he was violent to strike that blow. I tried to jerk the chisel free, but it wouldn't come. It often happens that way with a knife: bone or cartilage that has been pierced by a sharp instrument locks solid over the steel when an attempt is made to withdraw it. I didn't try again. Anyway, I didn't really want it. I had my own. Not a chisel, but a knife. I eased it out of the plastic sheath that had been sewn into the inner lining of my coat, just behind the neck. It didn't look so much, a four-inch handle and a little double-edged three-inch blade. I looked at it and looked at the inner door behind the radio table, the one that led to the radio-operator's sleeping cabin, then I slid a little fountain-pen torch from my breast pocket, crossed to the outer door, switched off the overhead lamp, did the same for the table-lamp and stood there, waiting.

How long I stood there I couldn't be sure. I told myself I was waiting until my eyes became adjusted to the almost total darkness inside the cabin, but I knew it wasn't that. Maybe I was waiting for some noise, the slightest imagined whisper of stealthy sound, or maybe I was just scared to go through that inner door. Scared for myself? Perhaps I was. I couldn't be sure. Or perhaps I was scared of what I would find behind that door. I transferred the knife to my left hand and slowly closed my fingers round the handle of the inner door.

It took me all of twenty seconds to open that door the twelve inches that was necessary for me to squeeze through the opening. In the very last half-inch the damned hinges creaked. With my steel-taut nerves in the state they were in, a six-inch naval gun going off in my ear would have sounded muffled by contrast. I stood petrified as any graven image, the dead man by my side was no more immobile than I. I

could hear the thump of my accelerating heart-beat and savagely wished the damned thing would keep quiet.

If there was anyone inside waiting to flash a torch in my face and shoot me, knife me or do a little fancy carving-up with a chisel, he was taking his time about it. I treated my lungs to a little oxygen, stepped soundlessly and sideways through the opening. I held the flash at the full outstretched extent of my right arm. If the ungodly are going to shoot at a person who is shining a torch at them, they generally aim in the very close vicinity of the torch, as the unwary habitually hold a torch in front of them. So I held the torch as far from my body as possible, drew my left arm back with the knife ready to go, hoping fervently that the reactions of any person who might be in that cabin were slower than mine, and slid forward the switch of the torch.

There was someone there all right, but I didn't have to worry about his reactions. He'd none left. He was lying face-down on the bunk with that huddled shapeless look that belongs only to the dead. I made a quick traverse of the cabin with the pencil beam. The dead man was alone. As in the radio cabin, there was no sign of a struggle.

The curtains were drawn. I quartered every foot of the deck, bulkheads and furniture with my flash. I don't know what I expected to find: what I found was nothing. I went out, closed the door behind me and searched the radio cabin with the same result. There was nothing more for me here; I had found all I wanted to find, all I had never wanted to find. And I never once looked at the faces of the two dead men. I didn't have to, they were faces I knew as well as the face that looked back at me every morning out of my shaving mirror.

And I had sent them to their deaths. Not willingly, not knowingly, but the ultimate responsibility had been mine. This had all been my idea, my brain-child and mine alone, and I'd overridden all objections and fast-talked our very doubtful and highly sceptical chief into giving, if at least not his enthusiastic approval, at least his grudging consent. I'd told the two men, Baker and Delmont, that if they played it my way no harm would come to them, so they'd trusted me blindly and played it my way and now they lay dead beside me. There was nothing more to be done here now. I'd sent two men to their deaths and that couldn't be undone. It was time to be gone.

I opened that outer door the way you'd open the door to a

cellar you knew to be full of cobras and black-widow spiders. The way *you* would open the door, that is: were cobras and black-widow spiders all I had to contend with aboard that ship, I'd have gone through that door without a second thought; they were harmless and almost lovable little creatures compared to some specimens of *homo sapiens* that were loose on the decks of the freighter *Nantesville* that night.

With the door opened at its fullest extent, I just stood there. I stood there for a long time without moving a muscle of body or limbs, breathing shallowly and evenly. I could hear the slap of waves against the hull, the occasional low metallic rumble as the *Nantesville* worked against wind and tide on its moorings, the low moan of the strengthening night wind in the rigging and, once, the far-off lonely call of a curlew. Foreign sounds, sounds of stealth and menace and danger, there were none. Silently I stepped out over the storm-sill.

I've never paddled along the night-time Orinoco in a dug-out canoe and had a thirty-foot anaconda drop from a tree, wrap a coil around my neck and start constricting me to death, and what's more I don't have to go there now to describe the experience, for I know exactly what it feels like. The sheer animal power, the feral ferocity of the pair of huge hands that closed round my neck from behind was terrifying—something I'd never known of, never dreamed of. After the first moment of blind panic and shocked paralysis, there was only one thought in my mind. It comes to us all and now it has come to me, someone who is stronger and more ruthless than I am.

I lashed back with all the power of my right foot, but the man behind me knew every rule in the book. His own right foot, travelling with even more speed and power than mine, smashed into the back of my swinging leg. My leg didn't just feel as if it had been broken, it felt as if it had been cut in half. I felt his left toe behind my left foot and stamped on it with every vicious ounce of power left me, but when my foot came down his toe wasn't there any more. All I had on my feet was a pair of thin rubber swimming-moccasins and the agonising jar from the steel deck-plates shot clear to the top of my head. I reached up my hands to break his little fingers, but he knew all about that, too, for his fingers were clenched into iron-hard balls with the second knuckle grinding into the carotid artery. In my ears I could hear the hiss of compressed air escaping under high pressure, and behind my eyes the shooting lines and flashes of colour were deepening and brightening by the moment.

What saved me in those first few seconds were the folded hood and the thick rubberised canvas neck-ruff of the scuba suit I was wearing under my coat. I bent forward in a convulsive jerk. Half of his weight came on my back, that throttling grip not easing a fraction, and at the same time he moved his feet as far backwards as possible, the instinctive reaction to my move—he would have thought that I was making a grab for one of his legs. When I had him momentarily off-balance I swung round in a short arc till both our backs were towards the sea. I thrust backwards with all my strength, one, two, three steps, accelerating all the way. The *Nantesville* didn't boast of any fancy teak guard-rails, just small-section chain, and the small of the strangler's back took our combined charging-weights on the top chain.

No shouts of agony from this lad. No gasps, even. Not a whisper of sound. But he'd been forced to break his grip, to grab swiftly at the upper chain to save us both from toppling over the side into the cold dark waters of Loch Houron. I thrust myself away and spun round to face him, my back against the radio-office bulkhead. I needed that bulkhead, too—any support while my swimming head cleared and a semblance of life came back into my numbed right leg.

Now I could see the white blur of face and hands and the general outline of his body. I'd expected some towering giant of a man, but he was no giant. In the gloom he seemed a compact and well-enough-made figure, but that was all. He wasn't even as big as I was. I had no compunction or false pride about running from a smaller man, and as far as this character was concerned the farther and faster the better. But not yet. My right leg wasn't up to it. I reached my hand behind my neck and brought the knife down, holding it in front of me, the blade in the palm of my hand so that he couldn't see the sheen of steel in the faint starlight.

He came at me calmly and purposefully. He was going for my throat again. I waited till his hand was inches from my face then jerked my own right hand violently upwards. Our hands smacked solidly together as the blade sliced cleanly through the centre of his palm.

He stepped quickly backwards, rubbed the back and front of his hand against his clothes, then licked it in a queer animal-like gesture. He peered closely at the blood welling from both side of his hand.

"So the little man has a little knife, has he?" he said softly. The voice was a shock. With this caveman-like strength I'd

have expected a caveman-like intelligence and voice to match, but the words came in the calm, pleasant, cultured, almost accentless speech of the well-educated southern Englishman. "We shall have to take the little knife from him, shan't we?" He raised his voice. "Captain Imrie!"

"Be quiet, you fool!" The urgent irate voice came from the direction of the crew accommodation aft. "Do you want to—"

"Don't worry, Captain. I have him. Here by the wireless office. He's armed. A knife. I'm just going to take it away from him."

"You have him? You have him? Good, good, good!" It was the kind of voice that a German or Austrian uses when he speaks English. "Be careful. This one I want alive. Jacques! Henry! Kramer! All of you. Quickly! The bridge. Wireless office."

"Alive," the man opposite me said pleasantly, "can also mean not quite dead." He sucked some more blood from the palm of his hand. "Or will you hand over the knife quietly and peaceably?"

I didn't wait for more. I didn't know how he was coming at me but I guessed it would be a dive. I took a quick step forward, flashed my torch a foot from his face, saw the dazzled eyes screw shut and kicked him. It wasn't as hard as it might have been, owing to the fact that my right leg still felt as if it were broken, nor as accurate, because of the darkness.

He just stood there, unable to move, bent forward and clutching himself with his hands.

I left; hobbled forward round the corner of the radio office, climbed up a life-raft and stretched myself flat on the deckhead.

The nearest running figures, some with torches, were already at the foot of the companionway leading up to the bridge. I had to get right aft to the rope with the rubber-covered hook I'd swung up to swarm aboard. But I couldn't do it until the midship decks were clear. And then, suddenly, I couldn't do it at all: now that the need for secrecy and stealth was over, someone had switched on the cargo loading-lights and the midships and foredecks were bathed in a brilliant dazzle of white. One of the foredeck arc-lamps was on a jumbo mast, just for'ard of and well above where I was lying. I felt as exposed as a fly pinned to a white ceiling.

They were up the companionway and by the radio office

now. I heard the sudden exclamations and curses and knew they'd found the hurt man: I didn't hear his voice so I assumed he wasn't able to speak yet.

The curt, authoritative German-accented voice took command. "Be silent. Jacques, you have your machine-pistol?"

"I have my pistol, Captain."

"Go aft. Stand at the entrance to the saloon and face for'ard. Cover the midships decks. We will go to the forepeak and then come aft in line abreast and drive him to you. If he doesn't surrender to you, shoot him through the legs. I want him alive."

"And if he jumps over the side, sir?"

"Do I have to tell you, Jacques?"

"No, sir."

I was just as clever as Jacques was. He didn't have to tell me, either. That nasty dry taste was back in my throat and mouth again. I'd a minute left, no more, and then it would be too late. I slid silently to the side of the radio-office roof, the starboard side, the side remote from the spot where Captain Imrie was issuing curt instructions to his men, lowered myself soundlessly to the deck and made my way to the wheelhouse.

I didn't need my torch in there, the backwash of light from the big arc-lamps gave me all the illumination I wanted. Crouching down, to keep below window-level, I looked around and saw what I wanted right away—a metal box of distress flares.

Two quick flicks of the knife severed the lashings that secured the flare-box to the deck. One piece of rope, perhaps ten feet in all, I left secured to a handle of the box. I pulled a plastic bag from the pocket of my coat, tore off the coat and the yachtsman's rubber trousers that I was wearing over my scuba suit, stuffed them inside and secured the bag to my waist. The coat and trousers had been essential. A figure in a dripping rubber diving-suit walking across the decks of the *Nantesville* would hardly have been likely to escape comment, whereas in the dusk and with the outer clothing I had on I could have passed for a crewman and, indeed, had done so: equally important, when I'd left the port of Torbay in my rubber dinghy it had been broad daylight, and the sight of a scuba-clad figure putting to sea towards evening wouldn't have escaped comment either, as the curiosity factor of the inhabitants of the smaller ports of the Western Highlands and Islands did not, I had discovered, lag noticeably behind that of their mainland brethren.

Still crouching low, I moved out through the wheelhouse door on to the starboard wing of the bridge. I reached the outer end and stood up straight. I had to, I had to take the risk, it was now or never—I could hear the crew already beginning to move forward to start their search. I lifted the flare-box over the side, eased it down the full length of the rope and started to swing it slowly, gently, from side to side.

As the box swung aft on its last arc I gave the rope a final thrust to achieve all the distance and momentum I could, opened my hands at the extremity of the arc and dropped down behind the canvas wind-dodger. It was as I dropped that I remembered I hadn't holed the damned box; I had no idea whether it would float or sink, but I did have a very clear idea of what would happen to me if it didn't sink.

I heard a shout from the main deck, some twenty or thirty feet aft of the bridge. I was certain I had been seen but I hadn't. A second after the shout came a loud and very satisfactory splash and a voice I recognised as Jacques' shouting: "He's gone over the side. Starboard abaft the bridge. A wandering lead, quick!" He must have been walking aft as ordered, seen this dark blur falling, heard the splash and come to the inevitable conclusion.

The men who had been moving forward to start the sweep for me now came running aft, pounding along the deck directly beneath where I was crouching on the wing of the bridge.

"Can you see him, Jacques?" Captain Imrie's voice, very quick, very calm.

"Not yet, sir."

"He'll be up soon. A dive like that must have knocked most of the breath out of him. Kramer, two men and into the boat. Take lamps and circle around. Henry, the box of grenades. Carlo, the bridge, quick. Starboard searchlight."

I felt chilled. I knew what an underwater explosion, even a small explosion, can do to the human body—it was twenty times as deadly as the same explosion on land. And I had to, I just had to, be in that water in minutes. But at least I could do something about that searchlight, it was only two feet above my head. I had the power cable in my left hand, the knife in my right and just brought the two into contact when my mind stopped thinking about those damned grenades and started working again. Cutting that cable would be about as clever as leaning over the wind-dodger and yelling, "Here I am, come and catch me." And I couldn't fool them twice. Hobbling as fast as I could, I passed through the wheelhouse

on to the port wing, slid down the ladder and ran towards the forepeak. The foredeck was deserted.

I heard a shout and the harsh chatter of some automatic weapon—Jacques and his machine-pistol, for a certainty. Had he imagined he'd seen something, had the box come to the surface, had he actually seen the box and mistaken it for me in the dark waters? It must have been the last of these—he wouldn't have wasted ammunition on anything he'd definitely recognised as a box.

They had the port anchor down. I swung over the side, got my feet in the hawse-pipe, reached down and grabbed the chain. The water was cold but my exposure suit took care of that. It was choppy, with a heavy tide running, both of which suited me well. I swam down the port side of the *Nantesville*, underwater for ninety per cent of the time, and I saw no-one and no-one saw me: all the activity was on the starboard side of the vessel.

My aqualung unit and weights and flippers were where I had left them, tied to the top of the rudder-post—the *Nantesville* was not much more than halfway down to her marks and the top of the post not far under water. Fitting on an aqualung in choppy seas with a heavy tide running isn't the easiest of tasks, but the thought of Kramer and his grenades was a considerable help.

I could hear the engine note of the lifeboat rising and falling as it circled off the ship's starboard side, but at no time did it come within a hundred feet of me. No more shots were fired and Captain Imrie had obviously decided against using the grenades. I adjusted the weights round my waist, dropped down in the dark safety of the waters, checked my direction on my luminous wrist-compass and started to swim. After five minutes I came to the surface, and after another five, felt my feet ground on the shore of the rocky islet where I'd cached my rubber dinghy.

I clambered up on the rocks and looked back. The *Nantesville* was ablaze with light. A searchlight was shining down into the sea and the lifeboat was still circling around. I hauled the dinghy into the water, climbed in, unshipped the two stubby oars and paddled off to the south-west. I was still within effective range of the searchlight, but its chances of picking up a black-clad figure in a low-silhouette black dinghy on those black waters were remote indeed. I took to the stubby oars again and rowed and rowed and rowed, but not for what seemed any longer than a month.

I arrived at the *Firecrest* at ten to three in the morning.

"Calvert?" Hunslett's voice was a barely-audible murmur in the darkness.

"Yes." Standing there above me on the *Firecrest*'s deck, he was more imagined than seen against the blackness of the night sky.

"Give me a hand to get the dinghy aboard."

"How did it go?"

"This first." I climbed up the accommodation ladder, painter in hand. I had to lift my right leg over the gunwale. Stiff and numb and just beginning to ache again, it could barely take my weight. "Hurry. We can expect company soon."

"So that's the way of it," Hunslett said thoughtfully. "Uncle Arthur *will* be pleased about this."

I said nothing to that. Our employer, Rear-Admiral Sir Arthur Arnford-Jason, K.C.B. and most of the rest of the alphabet, wasn't going to be pleased at all. We heaved the dripping dinghy in-board, unclamped the outboard and took them both on to the foredeck.

"Get me a couple of waterproof bags," I said. "Then start getting the anchor chain in."

"We're leaving?"

"We would if we had any sense. We're staying. Just get the anchor up and down."

By the time he'd returned with the bags I'd the dinghy deflated and in its canvas cover. I stripped off my aqualung and scuba suit and stuffed them into one of the bags along with the weights, my big-dialled waterproof watch and the combined wrist-compass and depth-gauge. I put the outboard in the other bag.

Hunslett had the electric windlass going and the chain coming in steadily. I heard the click as Hunslett's foot stepped on the deck-switch. "She's up and down."

I pulled the bags right for'ard, leaned out under the pulpit-rail and used lengths of heaving-line to secure them to the anchor chain. When the lines were secure, I lifted the bags over the side and let them dangle from the chain.

"I'll take the weight," I said. "Lift the chain off the drum —we'll lower it by hand."

Forty fathoms is 240 feet of chain and letting that lot down to the bottom didn't do my back or arms much good at all, and the rest of me was a long way below par before we started. But at last the job was done and we were able to go

below. If anyone wanted to investigate what lay at the foot of our anchor chain he'd need a steel articulated diving-suit.

Hunslett pulled the saloon door to behind us, moved around in the darkness adjusting the heavy velvet curtains, then switched on a small table-lamp. He had a dark narrow saturnine face, with a strong jaw, black bushy eyebrows and thick black hair—the kind of face which is so essentially an expression in itself that it rarely shows much else. It was expressionless now and very still.

"You'll have to buy another shirt," he said. "Your collar's too tight. Leaves marks."

I stopped towelling myself and looked in a mirror. Even in that dim light my neck looked a mess. It was badly swollen and discoloured, with four wicked-looking bruises where the thumbs and forefinger joints had sunk deep into the flesh.

"He got me from behind. I was lucky. He also wears heavy boots." I twisted around and looked down at my right calf. The bruise was bigger than my fist and there was a deep red gash across the middle of it and blood was ebbing slowly along its entire length.

Hunslett gazed at it with interest. "I'd better fix that for you."

"I don't need bandages. What I need is a Scotch. Stop wasting your time. Oh, hell, sorry, yes, you'd better fix it, we can't have our guests sloshing about ankle-deep in blood."

"You're very sure we're going to have guests."

"I half expected to have them waiting on the doorstep when I got back to the *Firecrest*. We're going to have guests, all right. Whatever our pals aboard the *Nantesville* may be, they're no fools. They'll have figured out by this time that I could have approached only by dinghy. They'll know too, that it was no nosey-parker local prowling about the ship—no local lad would get aboard as I did, behave aboard as I did or leave as I did. The local lad would be dead."

"I shouldn't wonder. And?"

"So we're not locals. We're visitors. We wouldn't be staying at any hotel or boarding-house—too restricted, couldn't move. Almost certainly we'll have a boat. Now, where would our boat be? Not to the north of Loch Houron, for with a forecast promising a south-west Force 6 strengthening to Force 7, no boat is going to be daft enough to hang about a lee shore in that lot. The only holding ground and shallow enough sheltered anchorage in the other direction, down the

Sound for forty miles, is in Torbay—and that's only four or five miles from where the *Nantesville* was lying at the mouth of Loch Houron. Where would you look for us?"

"I'd look for a boat anchored in Torbay. Which gun do you want?"

"I don't want any gun. You don't want any gun. People like us don't carry guns."

"Marine biologists don't carry guns," he nodded. "Employees of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries don't carry guns. Civil Servants are above reproach. So we play it clever. You're the boss."

"I don't feel clever any more. And I'll take long odds that I'm not your boss any more. Not after Uncle Arthur hears what I have to tell him."

"You haven't told *me* anything yet." He finished tying the bandage round my leg and straightened. "How's that feel?"

I tried it. "Better. Thanks. Better still when you've taken the cork from that bottle. Get into pyjamas or something. People found fully dressed in the middle of the night cause eyebrows to go up."

He poured me a large drink, a smaller one for himself, and added water to both. It tasted the way Scotch always does after you've swum and rowed for hours and damn near got yourself killed in the process.

"There isn't much to tell and all of it is bad. I got there without trouble. I hid behind Carrara Point till it was dusk and then paddled out to the Bogha Nuadh. I left the dinghy there and swam underwater as far as the stern of the ship. It was the *Nantesville* all right. Name and flag were different, a mast was gone and the white superstructure was black—but it was her all right. Near as dammit didn't make it—it was close to the turn of the tide but it took me thirty minutes against that current. I had to hang on to the stern post for ten minutes before I'd got enough strength back to shin up the rope."

"You took a chance."

"It was near enough dark. There were only two or three people in the after accommodation. Just a skeleton crew aboard, seven or eight, no more. All the original crew have vanished completely."

"No sign of them anywhere?"

"No sign. Dead or alive, no sign at all. I had a bit of bad luck. I was leaving the after accommodation to go to the bridge when I passed someone a few feet away. I gave a

half wave and grunted something and he answered back, I don't know what. I followed him back to the quarters. He picked up a phone in the galley and I heard him talking to someone, quick and urgent. Said that one of the original crew must have been hiding and was trying to get away. I couldn't stop him—he faced the door as he was talking and he had a gun in his hand. I had to move quickly. I walked to the bridge structure—"

"You what? When you knew they were on to you?"

"It was the only chance I'd ever have. I didn't stop at the bridge. I went right for'ard and hid behind the winchman's shelter. For about ten minutes there was a fair bit of commotion and a lot of flash-light work around the bridge island, then I saw and heard them moving aft—must have thought I was still in the after accommodation.

"I went through all the officers' cabins in the bridge island. No-one. One cabin, an engineer's, I think, had smashed furniture and a carpet heavily stained with dry blood. Next door, the captain's bunk had been saturated with blood. Then I found Baker and Delmont."

"So you found them." Hunslett's eyes were hooded, gazing down at the glass in his hand. I wished to God he'd show some expression on that dark face of his.

"Delmont must have made a last-second attempt to send a call for help. They'd been warned not to, except in emergency, so they must have been discovered. He'd been stabbed in the back with a half-inch wood chisel and then dragged into the radio-officer's cabin which adjoined the radio office. Some time later Baker had come in. He was wearing an officer's clothes—some desperate attempt to disguise himself, I suppose. He'd a gun in his hand, but he was looking the wrong way and the gun was pointing the wrong way. The same chisel in the back."

Hunslett poured himself another drink and swallowed half of it in one gulp. He said: "And they hadn't all gone aft. They'd left a reception committee."

"They're very clever. They're very dangerous. Maybe we've moved out of our class. Or I have. A one-man reception committee, but when that one man was this man, two would have been superfluous. I know he killed Baker and Delmont. I'll never be so lucky again."

"You got away. Your luck hadn't run out."

And Baker's and Delmont's had. I knew he was blaming me. I knew London would blame me. I blamed myself.

"Uncle Arthur," Hunslett said. "Don't you think—"

"The hell with Uncle Arthur. Who cares about Uncle Arthur? How in God's name do you think I feel?"

"Not about that," he said. "About the *Nantesville*. Now that she's been identified *as* the *Nantesville*, now we know her new name and flag—"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does matter. We radio Uncle Arthur—"

"And have our guests find us in the engine-room with earphones round our heads. Are you mad?"

"You seem damned sure they'll come."

"I *am* sure. You, too. You said so."

"I agreed this is where they would come. *If* they came."

"If they come. *If* they come! Good God, man, for all they know I was aboard that ship for hours. I may have the names and full descriptions of all of them. As it happens, I couldn't identify any of them and their names may or may not mean anything. But they're not to know that. They're too good to be little men. Some must be known."

"In that case they'd be too late, anyway."

"Not without the sole witness who could testify against them."

"We'd better have those guns out."

"No."

"Then for God's sake let's get out of here."

"No."

"Baker and Delmont. Think of them."

"I'm thinking of nothing else but them. You don't have to stay."

He set his glass down very carefully. He was really letting himself go tonight—he'd allowed that dark craggy face its second expression in ten minutes and it wasn't a very encouraging one. Then he picked up his glass and grinned.

"You don't know what you're saying," he said kindly. "Your neck—that's what comes from the blood supply to the brain being interrupted. You're not fit to fight off a teddy-bear. Who's going to look after you if they start playing games?"

"I'm sorry," I said. I meant it. I'd worked with Hunslett maybe ten times in the ten years I'd known him and it had been a stupid thing for me to say. About the only thing Hunslett was incapable of was leaving your side in time of trouble. "You were speaking of Uncle?"

"Yes. We know where the *Nantesville* is. Uncle could

get a Navy boat to shadow her by radar if we radio him—"

"I know where she was. She upped anchor as I left. By dawn she'll be a hundred miles away—in any direction."

"She's gone? We've scared them off? Uncle's going to love this. But we have her new description—"

"I said that didn't matter. By tomorrow she'll have another."

"An air search. We could—"

"By the time an air search could be organised they'd have twenty thousand square miles of sea to cover. You've heard the forecast. It's bad. Low cloud—and they'd have to fly under the low cloud. Cuts their effectiveness by ninety per cent. And poor visibility and rain. Not a chance in a hundred, not one in a thousand of positive identification. And if they do locate them—if—what then?"

"The Navy. They could call up the Navy—"

"Call up what Navy? The Navy has very few ships left and practically none in those parts. By the time any naval vessel could get to the scene it would be night again and the *Nantesville* to hell and gone. Even if a naval ship did catch up with it, what then? Sink it with gunfire—with maybe the twenty-five missing crew members of the *Nantesville* locked up in the hold?"

"A boarding-party?"

"With the same twenty-five ex-crew members lined up on deck with pistols at their backs and Captain Imrie and his thugs politely asking the Navy boys what their next move was going to be?"

"I'll get into my pyjamas," Hunslett said tiredly. At the doorway he paused and turned. "If the *Nantesville* has gone, her crew—the new crew—have gone, too, and we'll be having no visitors after all. Had you thought of that?"

"No."

"I don't really believe it either."

THEY came at twenty-past four in the morning. They came in a very calm and orderly and law-abiding and official fashion; they stayed for forty minutes and by the time they had left I still wasn't sure whether they were our men or not.

Hunslett came into my small cabin, starboard-side forward, switched on the light and shook me. "Wake up," he said.

I was wide awake. "What the hell's up? It's just after four in the morning."

"Don't ask me what's up," Hunslett said irritably.

"Police. Just come aboard. They say it's urgent."

"It better bloody well be urgent. In the middle of the bloody night! Haven't you told them who we are? Oh, all right, I'm coming."

Hunslett left, and thirty seconds afterwards I joined him in the saloon. Four men sat there, two police officers and two Customs officials. They didn't look a very villainous bunch to me. The older, bigger policeman got to his feet. A tall, burly, brown-faced sergeant in his late forties, he looked me over with a cold eye, looked at the near-empty whisky bottle with the two unwashed glasses on the table, then looked back at me. He didn't like wealthy effete yachtsmen who wore red-silk dragon Chinese dressing-gowns with a Paisley scarf to match, tied negligently round the neck. I didn't like them very much myself, especially the Paisley scarf, much in favour though it was with the yachting fraternity: but I had to have something to conceal those bruises on my neck.

"Are you the owner of this boat, sir?" the sergeant inquired. An unmistakable West Highland voice and a courteous one, but it took him all his time to get his tongue round the "sir."

"If you would tell me what makes it any of your damn business," I said unpleasantly, "maybe I'll answer that and maybe I won't. You have to have a warrant before you shove your way in. Or don't you know the law?"

"He knows the law," one of the Customs men put in. A small dark character, smooth-shaven at four in the morning, with a persuasive voice, not West Highland. "Be reasonable. This is not the sergeant's job. We got him out of bed almost three hours ago. He's just obliging us."

I ignored him. I said to the sergeant: "This is the middle of the night in a lonely Scottish bay. How would you feel if four unidentified men came aboard in the middle of the night? Any means of identifying yourselves?"

"Identifying myself?" The sergeant stared coldly at me. "I don't have to identify myself. Sergeant MacDonald. I've been in charge of the Torbay police station for eight years." If he was who he claimed to be, this was the first time in his life that anyone had asked him for identification. He nodded to the seated policeman: "Police Constable MacDonald."

"Your son?" The resemblance was unmistakable. "Nothing like keeping it in the family, eh, Sergeant?" I didn't know whether to believe him or not. "And Customs? I know the law about you, too. No search warrants for you boys. I believe the police would like your powers. Go anywhere you like and ask no-one's permission beforehand."

"Yes, sir." It was the younger Customs man who answered. Medium height, fair hair, running a little to fat, Belfast accent, dressed like the other in blue overcoat, peaked hat, brown

gloves, smartly-creased trousers. "We hardly ever do, though. We like to ask."

"And you'd like to ask to search this boat, is that it?" Hunslett said.

"Yes, sir."

"Why?" I asked. Puzzlement now in my voice. And in my mind. I just didn't know what I had on my hands. "If we're all going to be so courteous and co-operative, could we have any explanation?"

"No reason in the world why not, sir." The older Customs man was almost apologetic. "A truck with contents valued at £12,000 was hi-jacked on the Ayrshire coast last night—night before last, that is, now. In the news this evening. From information received, we know it was transferred to a small boat. We think it came north. This is the third port we've visited and the thirteenth boat—the fourth in Torbay—that we've been on in the past fifteen hours. We've been kept on the run, I can tell you."

"What are we—um—supposed to have stolen?"

"Chemicals. It was an ICI truck."

"Chemicals?" I looked at Hunslett, grinned, then turned back to the Customs officer. "Chemicals, eh? We're loaded with them. But not £12,000 worth, I'm afraid."

There was a brief silence. MacDonald said: "Would you mind explaining, sir?"

"Not at all." I lit a cigarette, the little mind enjoying its big moment, and smiled. "This is a government boat, Sergeant MacDonald. I thought you would have seen the flag. Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. We're marine biologists. Our after-cabin is a floating laboratory. And if you've still any doubt left I can give you two numbers, one in Glasgow, one in London, that will establish our *bona fides*."

"Yes, sir." The lack of impression I had made on the sergeant was total. "Where did you go this evening?"

"I beg your pardon, Sergeant?"

"You were seen to leave this boat in a black rubber dinghy about five o'clock this evening." I'd heard of icy fingers playing up and down one's spine but it wasn't fingers I felt then, it was a centipede with a hundred icy boots on. "You went out into the Sound. The postmaster saw you."

"I hate to impugn the character of a fellow civil servant but he must have been drunk. I haven't got a black rubber dinghy. You just get out your little magnifying glass, Sergeant, and if you can find a black rubber dinghy I'll make you a present of the brown wooden dinghy, which is the only one we have on the *Firecrest*."

"So you weren't out?"

"I *was* out. In our own dinghy. I was just round the

corner of Garve Island there, collecting some marine samples from the Sound. I can show them to you in the after-cabin. We're not here on a holiday, you know."

"No offence, no offence. Mr. McIlroy's eyesight isn't what it was and everything looks black against the setting sun. You don't *look* the type who'd land on the shores of the Sound and bring down the telephone wires to the mainland."

Cut off. How very convenient for somebody.

"Did you mean what I thought you to mean, Sergeant?" I said slowly. "That you suspected me—"

"We can't take chances, sir," said MacDonald.

"You won't mind if we take a little look round?" The dark-haired Customs officer was apologetic. "If you were the hi-jackers—I appreciate now that it's a chance in a million, but still—and if we didn't search—well, we'd be out of a job tomorrow. Just a formality."

"I wouldn't want to see that happen, Mr.—"

"Thomas. Thank you. Your ship's papers? Ah, thank you." He handed them to the younger man. "Let's see now. Ah, the wheelhouse. Could Mr. Durran here use the wheelhouse to make copies? Won't take five minutes."

"Certainly. Wouldn't he be more comfortable here?"

"We're modernised now, sir. Portable photo-copier. Standard on the job. Has to be dark. Won't take five minutes. Can we begin in this laboratory of yours?"

A formality, he'd said. Well, he was right there—as a search it was the least informal thing I'd ever come across. Five minutes after he'd gone to the wheelhouse Durran came aft to join us, and he and Thomas went through the *Firecrest* as if they were looking for the Koh-i-noor. To begin with, at least. Every piece of mechanical and electrical equipment in the after-cabin had to be explained to them. They spent most time of all in the engine-room. It was worth examining. Everything looked brand new, and gleamed. Thomas seemed especially interested in the batteries.

"You carry a lot of reserve there, Mr. Petersen," he said. He'd learned my name by now, even though it wasn't the one I'd been christened with. "Why all the power?"

"We haven't even got enough. Care to start those two engines by hand? We have eight electric motors in the lab—and the only time they're used, in harbour, we can't run either the engines or generators to supply juice. Then there's the central heating, hot and cold water pumps, radar, radio, automatic steering, windlass, power winch for the dinghy, echo-sounder, navigation lights, cooker—"

"You win, you win." He'd become quite friendly by this time. "Boats aren't really in my line. Let's move forward, shall we?"

The remainder of the inspection, curiously, didn't take long. In the saloon I found that Hunslett had persuaded the Torbay police force to accept the hospitality of the *Firecrest*. Sergeant MacDonald hadn't exactly become jovial, but he was much more human than when he'd come on board. Constable MacDonald, I noticed, didn't seem so relaxed. He looked positively glum.

If the examination of the saloon was cursory, that of the two forward cabins was positively perfunctory. And Thomas didn't even glance at the wheelhouse—Durran had been there, of course. He had a quick look at one of the deck lockers but that was all. We were in the clear. A civil goodbye on both sides and they were gone. Their boat, a big indeterminate shape in the darkness, seemed to have plenty of power.

"Odd," I said. "That boat. Any idea what it was like?"

"How could I?" Hunslett was testy. He was as short of sleep as I was. "It was pitch dark."

"That's just the point. A gentle glow in their wheelhouse —and no more. No deck lights, no interior lights, no navigation lights, even."

"Sergeant MacDonald has been looking out over this harbour for eight years. Do you need light to find your way about your own living room after dark?"

"I haven't got twenty yachts and cruisers in my living room swinging all over the place with wind and tide. And wind and tide doesn't alter my own course when I'm crossing my living room. There are only three boats in the harbour carrying anchor lights. He'll have to use something to see where he's going."

And he did. From the direction of the receding sound of engines a light stabbed out into the darkness.

"'Odd' was the word you used," Hunslett murmured. "Quite a good word, too, in the circumstances. And what are we to think of the alleged Torbay police force?"

"You talked to the sergeant longer than I did. When I was aft with Thomas and Durran."

"I'd like to think otherwise," Hunslett said inconsequentially. "It would make things easier, in a way. But I can't. MacDonald is a genuine old-fashioned cop and a good one."

"A good cop and an honest one," I agreed. "This is not his line of country and he was fooled. It is our line of country and we were fooled. Until now, that is."

"Speak for yourself."

"Thomas made one careless remark. An off-beat remark. You didn't hear it—we were in the engine-room. He said: 'Boats aren't really in my line.' Probably thought he'd been asking too many questions and wanted to reassure me. Boats not in his line—a Customs officer and boats not in his line!

They only spend their lives aboard boats, examining boats, that's all. Another thing, did you notice how sharply dressed they were?"

"Customs officers don't usually go around in oil-stained overalls."

"They've been living in those clothes for twenty-four hours. This is the what—the thirteenth boat they've searched in that time. Would you still have knife-edged creases to your pants after that lot?"

"What else did they say? What else did they do?" Hunslett asked. "Take an undue interest in anything?"

"Wait a minute. Thomas seemed intrigued by the batteries, by the large amount of reserve electrical power we had."

"Did he now? And did you notice how lightly our two Customs friends swung aboard their launch when leaving? Both of them had their hands free. They weren't carrying anything. They should have been carrying something."

"The photo-copier! I'm getting old."

"The photo-copier. Standard equipment my ruddy foot. So if our fair-haired pal wasn't busy photo-copying he was busy doing something else."

We moved inside the wheelhouse. Hunslett selected the larger screwdriver from the tool-rack beside the echo-sounder and had the face plate off our RT/DF set inside sixty seconds. He looked at the interior for five seconds, looked at me for the same length of time, then started screwing the face-plate back into position. One thing was certain—we wouldn't be using that transmitter.

I turned away and stared out through the wheelhouse windows into the darkness. I felt desperately tired. But my eyes were still working. Hunslett offered me a cigarette. I didn't want one, but I took one. And then I had caught his wrist and was staring down at his palm.

"Well, well," I said. "The cobbler should stick to his last. Wrong proverb. Can't think of the right one. A good workman uses only his own tools. No wonder my neck was twitching when Durran was around. How did you cut yourself?"

"I didn't cut myself."

"I know. But there's a smear of blood on your palm. You noticed Durran never took his gloves off, even when he had that drink?"

"I'm the best noticer you ever saw." He sounded bitter. "Why didn't they clobber us? You, anyway. The star witness."

"Two reasons. They couldn't do anything with the cops there—"

"But why cops in the first place?"

"Aura of respectability. When a uniformed policeman shoves his uniformed cap above your gunwale in the dark watches of the night, you don't whack him over the head with a marline-spike. You invite him aboard."

"And the second point?"

"They took a big chance, a desperate chance, almost, with Durran. He was thrown to the wolves to see what the reaction would be, whether either of us recognised him."

"Why Durran?"

"I didn't tell you. I shone a torch in his face. The face didn't register, just a white blur with screwed-up eyes half-hidden behind an upflung hand. I was really looking lower down, picking the right spot to kick him. But they weren't to know that. They wanted to find out if we would recognise him. We didn't. Not a flicker of recognition. Nobody can act like that. I defy any man in the world to meet up again in the same night with a man who has murdered two other people and nearly murdered him without at least twitching an eyebrow. So the immediate heat is off, the urgent necessity to do us in has become less urgent. It's a safe bet that if we didn't recognise Durran, then we recognised nobody on the *Nantesville* and so we won't be burning up the lines to Interpol."

"We're in the clear?"

"I wish to God we were. They're on to us. I don't know how I know," I said. "But halfway through the engine-room search they weren't interested any more. At least Thomas wasn't. He'd found out something. You saw him afterwards in the saloon, the fore cabins and the upper deck. He couldn't have cared less."

"So they'll be back."

"They'll be back."

"I get the guns out now?"

"There's no hurry. Our friends will be sure we can't communicate with anyone. Assuming there are no carrier pigeons in Torbay, what's the only remaining means of communication with the mainland?"

"There's the *Shangri-la*." The *Shangri-la*, the nearest craft to ours, was white, gleaming, a hundred and twenty feet long and wouldn't have left her owner a handful of change from a quarter of a million pounds when he'd bought her. "She'll have a couple of thousand quids' worth of radio equipment aboard. Then there are two, maybe three yachts big enough to carry transmitters. The rest will carry only receivers."

"And how many transmitters in Torbay harbour will still be in operating condition tomorrow?"

"One."

"One. Our friends will attend to the rest. They'll have to.

We can't warn anyone. We can't give ourselves away."

Hunslett glanced at his watch. "This would be a nice time to wake up Uncle Arthur."

"I can't put it off any longer."

What made the *Firecrest* unique was that while she had two screws and two propeller shafts, she had only one engine. Two engine casings, but only one engine, even though that one engine was a special job fitted with an underwater by-pass exhaust valve. A simple matter of disengaging the fuel-pump coupling and unscrewing four bolts on top—the rest were dummies—enabled the entire head of the diesel starboard engine to be lifted clear away, together with the fuel lines and injectors. With the assistance of the seventy-foot telescopic radio-mast housed inside our aluminium foremast, the huge gleaming transmitter that took up eighty per cent of the space inside the starboard engine casing could have sent a signal to the moon. As Thomas had observed, we had power and to spare. As it happened, I didn't want to send a signal to the moon, just to Uncle Arthur in Knightsbridge.

Hunslett reached for a heavy coat, pulled it on, made for the door and stopped. "I thought I'd take a walk on the upper deck, while you're talking. Just in case." He lifted one of the Lugers from its clamp, checked the loading-indicator and left. It wasn't that he was imagining he could already hear stealthy footsteps on the upper deck—he just didn't want to be around when Uncle Arthur came on the air. I didn't blame him. I didn't really want to be around then, either.

I hung on a pair of ear-phones, turned on the set, pulled another switch that actuated the call-up, and waited. I didn't have to tune in, the transmitter was permanently pre-set, and pre-set on VHF. The red receiver warning-light came on. I reached down and adjusted the magic-eye control until the green fans met in the middle.

"This is station SPFX," a voice came.

"Good morning. This is Caroline. May I speak to the manager, please?"

"Will you wait, please?" This meant that Uncle Arthur was in bed. Uncle Arthur was never at his best on rising. Three minutes passed and the ear-phones came to life again.

"Good morning, Caroline. This is Annabelle. Proceed."

"I located the missing vessel this afternoon. Four or five miles north-west of here. I went on board tonight."

"You did *what*, Caroline?"

"Went on board. The old crew has gone home. There's a new crew aboard. A smaller crew."

"You located Betty and Dorothy?" Despite the fact that we both had scramblers fitted to our radio phones, making intelligible eavesdropping impossible, Uncle Arthur always

insisted that we spoke in a roundabout riddle fashion and used code names for his employees and himself. Girls' names for our surnames, initials to match. An irritating foible, but one that we had to observe. He was Annabelle, I was Caroline, Baker was Betty, Delmont, Dorothy and Hunslett, Harriet.

"I found them." I took a deep breath. "They won't be coming home again, Annabelle."

"They won't be coming home again," he repeated mechanically. He was silent for so long that I began to think that he had gone off the air. Then he came again, his voice empty, remote. "I warned you of this Caroline. And the vessel?"

"I don't know. Gone. North, I suppose."

"North, you suppose." Uncle Arthur never raised his voice—it was the savage control he maintained now which betrayed his anger. "North where? After all the time, the trouble, the planning, the expense, you've lost her." He might have spared me that bit about the planning, it had been mine all the way. "And Betty and Dorothy."

"Yes, Annabelle, I've lost her." I could feel the slow anger in myself. "And there's worse than that, if you want to listen to it." I told him the rest and at the end of it he said: "I see. You've lost the vessel. You've lost Betty and Dorothy. And now our friends know about you, the one vital element of secrecy is gone for ever and every usefulness and effectiveness you might ever have had is completely negated." A pause. "I shall expect you in my office at 9 p.m. tonight. Instruct Harriet to take the boat back to base."

"Yes, sir." The hell with his Annabelle. "I had expected that. I've failed. I've let you down. I'm being pulled off."

"Nine o'clock tonight, Caroline. I'll be waiting."

"You'll have a long wait, Annabelle."

"And what might you mean by that?"

"There are no planes to this place, Annabelle. The mailboat doesn't call for another four days. The weather's breaking down and I wouldn't risk our boat to try to get to the mainland. I'm stuck here for the time being, I'm afraid."

"Do you take me for a nincompoop, sir? Go ashore this morning. An air-sea rescue helicopter will pick you up at noon. Nine p.m. at my office. Don't keep me waiting."

"Couldn't you give me another twenty-four hours?"

"Now you're being ridiculous. And wasting my time. I'd thought better of you than that. Goodbye."

"Goodbye. We may meet again, sometime. It's not likely."

I switched the radio off, lit a cigarette and waited. The call-up came through in half a minute. I waited another half-minute and switched on.

"Caroline? Is that you, Caroline?" I could have sworn to a note of agitation in his voice.

"Yes."

"What did you say? At the end there?"

"Goodbye. You said goodbye. I said goodbye."

"Don't quibble with me, sir. You said—"

"If you want me aboard that helicopter," I said, "you'll have to send an armed guard with the pilot. I hope they're good. I've got a Luger, and you know I'm good. And if I have to kill anyone and go into court, then you'll have to stand there beside me, because there's no single civil action or criminal charge that even you, with all your connections, can bring against me that would justify the sending of armed men to apprehend me, an innocent man. Further, I am no longer in your employ. The terms of my civil service contract state clearly that I can resign at any moment, provided that I am not actively engaged on an operation at that moment. You've pulled me off, you've recalled me to London. My resignation will be on your desk as soon as the mail can get through. Baker and Delmont weren't your friends. They were my friends. They were my friends ever since I joined the service. You have the temerity to sit there and lay all the blame for their deaths on my shoulders when you know damn well that every operation must have your final approval, and now you have the final temerity to deny me a one last chance to square accounts. I'm sick of your damned soulless service."

"Now wait a moment, Caroline." There was a cautious, almost placatory note to his voice. "No need to go off half-cocked." I was sure that no-one had ever talked to Rear-Admiral Sir Arthur Arnford-Jason like that before, but he didn't seem particularly upset about it. His infinitely agile and shrewd mind would be examining and discarding possibilities with the speed of a computer; he'd be wondering whether I was playing a game and, if so, how far he could play it with me without making it impossible for me to retreat from the edge of the precipice. Finally he said quietly: "You wouldn't want to hang around there just to shed tears. You're on to something."

"Yes, sir, I'm on to something." I wondered what in the name of God I was on to.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours, Caroline."

"Forty-eight."

"Forty-eight hours. Report to me at noon and midnight." A click. Uncle Arthur was gone.

The false dawn was in the sky when I went on deck. Cold heavy slanting driving rain was churning up the foam-flecked sea. The *Firecrest* was corkscrewing quite heavily now on the outer arc of the swing, pitching in the centre of them.

Hunslett was abaft the saloon, huddling in what little shelter it afforded. He looked up at my approach and said: "What

do you make of that?" He pointed to the palely-gleaming shape of the *Shangri-la*. Lights were burning brightly in the fore part of her superstructure, where the wheelhouse would be.

"What do you think it is—our recent guests laying about the *Shangri-la*'s radio installation with crow-bars?" I said. "Maybe they leave lights on all night."

"Came on just ten minutes ago. And look, now—they're out. Funny. How did you get on with Uncle?"

"Badly. Fired me, then changed his mind. We have forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours? What are you going to do in forty-eight hours?"

"God knows. Have some sleep first. You, too. Too much light in the sky for callers now."

EXACTLY three hours after dropping off I was wide awake again. I would have had to be stone deaf, drugged or dead to go on sleeping through the bawling and thumping that was currently assailing my left ear from what appeared to be a distance of not more than twelve inches.

"Ahoy, there, *Firecrest*! Ahoy there!" Thump, thump, thump on the boat's side. "Can I come aboard?"

I opened the door across the passage. Hunslett was sound asleep and snoring. I returned to my own cabin and got busy with the dressing-gown and Paisley scarf again, and made my way to the upper deck.

It didn't require the name on the bows or the crew's hats to let me know that this was the tender that normally took up most of the after-deck space on the *Shangri-la*.

Amidships a stocky figure, clad in a white, vaguely naval, brass-buttoned uniform, stopped banging his gloved fist against the *Firecrest*'s planking and glared up at me. "Ha! There you are at last. Took your time about it, didn't you? I'm soaked, man, soaked!" A few spots of rain did show up quite clearly on the white seersucker. "May I come aboard?" He didn't wait for any permission, just leapt aboard with surprising nimbleness for a man of his build and years and nipped into the *Firecrest*'s wheelhouse ahead of me.

He was a short, powerfully-built character, fifty-five I would have guessed, with a heavily-tanned jowled face, close-cropped iron-grey hair with tufted eyebrows to match, long straight nose and a mouth that looked as if it had been closed with a zip-fastener.

"Sorry for the delay," I apologised. "Short of sleep. We had the Customs aboard in the middle of the night and I couldn't get off after that."

"The Customs did you say? Damned intolerable bunch of

busy-bodies. What the deuce did they imagine they wanted?"

"They were looking for stolen chemicals. Stolen from some place in Ayrshire."

"Idiots!" He thrust out a stubby hand; he'd passed his final judgment on the unfortunate Customs and the subject was now closed. "Skouras. Sir Anthony Skouras."

"Petersen." His grip made me wince, less from the sheer power of it than from the gouging effects of the large number of thickly-encrusted rings that adorned his fingers. "Sir Anthony Skouras. I've heard of you, of course."

"Nothing good. Columnists don't like me because they know I despise them. A Cypriot who made his shipping millions through sheer ruthlessness, they say. True. Asked by the Greek government to leave Athens. True. Became a naturalised British citizen and bought a knighthood. Absolutely true. Charitable works and public services. Money can buy anything. A baronetcy next but the market's not right at the moment. Price is bound to fall. Can I use your radio transmitter? I see you have one."

"What's that?" The abrupt switch had me off-balance.

"Your radio transmitter, man! Must get through to my New York broker at once!"

"Sorry. Certainly you may, but your own—"

"It's out of action. This is urgent, Mr. Petersen."

"Immediately. You know how to operate this model?"

He smiled thinly. "I think I can manage, Mr. Petersen."

"Call me when you're finished. I'll be in the saloon." He'd be calling me before he'd finished, he'd be calling me before he'd even started. I went down to the saloon, contemplated a shave and decided against it. It wouldn't take that long. It didn't. He appeared at the saloon door inside a minute, his face grim. "Your radio is out of order, Mr. Petersen."

"They're tricky to operate, some of those older jobs," I said.

"I say it's out of order. I mean it's out of order."

"Damned odd. It was working—"

"Would you care to try it, please?"

I tried it. Nothing. I twiddled everything I could lay hands on. "A power failure, perhaps," I suggested.

"Would you be so good as to remove the face-plate?"

I stared at him in perplexity, switching the expression, after a suitable interval, to shrewd thoughtfulness. "What do you know, Sir Anthony, that I don't?"

"You'll find out."

So I found out and went through all the proper motions of consternation, incredulity and tight-lipped indignation. Finally I said: "You knew. How did you know?"

"Obvious, isn't it?"

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"*Your* transmitter," I said slowly. "It's more than just out of order—it's smashed. You had the same midnight caller. But who in God's name? It must be the work of a madman."

"Is it? Is it the work of a madman? I know something of those matters. My first wife—" He broke off abruptly and gave an odd shake of the head, then went on slowly: "The mentally disturbed are irrational, haphazard, purposeless, aimless in their behaviour patterns. This seems an entirely irrational act, but an act with a method and a purpose to it. There's a reason. At first I thought the reason was to cut off my connection with the mainland. But by rendering me temporarily incommunicado nobody stands to gain and I don't stand to lose. No, Mr. Petersen, I am not the target. We have here an A and a B. A regards it as vital that he remains in constant communication with the mainland. B regards it as vital that A doesn't. So B takes steps. There's something damned funny going on in Torbay. And something big. I have a nose for such things."

I said: "Reported this to the police yet?"

"Going there now. After I've made a phone call or two." The eyes suddenly became bleak and cold. "Unless our friend has smashed up the two public call boxes in the main street."

"He's done better than that. He's brought down the lines to the mainland."

He stared at me, wheeled to leave, then turned, his face empty of expression. "How did you know that?"

"Police told me. They were aboard with the Customs last night."

"The police? What were they doing here?" He paused and looked at me with his cold measuring eyes. "A personal question, Mr. Petersen. No impertinence intended. What are *you* doing here?"

"No offence. My friend and I are marine biologists. A working trip. Not our boat—the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries." I smiled.

"Marine biology, eh?" He was speaking absent-mindedly, his thoughts elsewhere. "Could you describe the policeman in charge, Mr. Petersen?"

I did and he nodded. "That's him all right. Odd, very odd. Must have a word with Archie about this."

"Archie?"

"Sergeant MacDonald. This is my fifth consecutive season's cruising based on Torbay. Know quite a few of the locals pretty well by now. He was alone?"

"No. A young constable. His son, he said. Melancholy sort of lad."

"Peter MacDonald. He has reason for his melancholy, Mr. Petersen. His two young brothers, sixteen years old, twins,

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died a few months back. At an Inverness school, lost in a late snowstorm in the Cairngorms. The father is tougher, doesn't show it so much. A great tragedy. I knew them both. Fine boys. Now I must be on my way, Mr. Petersen. Put this damned strange affair in MacDonald's hands. Don't see that he can do much. Then off for a short cruise."

I looked through the wheelhouse windows at the dark skies, the white-capped seas, the driving rain. "You picked a day for it."

"The rougher the better." He smiled suddenly and put out his hand. "Sorry to have barged in. You and your colleague care to come aboard for a drink tonight? We eat early at sea. Eight o'clock, say? I'll send the tender." That meant we didn't rate an invitation to dinner, which would have made a change from Hunslett and his damned baked beans, but even an invitation like this would have given rise to envious tooth-gnashing in some of the stateliest homes in the land.

The midday reception from London was poor. This was due less to the fact that reception is always better after dark than to the fact that I couldn't use our telescopic radio mast: but it was fair enough and Uncle's voice was brisk and businesslike and clear.

"Well, Caroline, we've found our missing friends," he said. "All twenty-five." That made it the former crew of the *Nantesville*. "Two of them are pretty badly hurt but they'll be all right." That accounted for the blood I had found in the captain's and one of the engineers' cabins.

The *Nantesville* had sailed from Bristol, she couldn't have been more than a few hours on her way before she'd been hi-jacked.

"Exactly the same procedure as on the previous occasions," Uncle Arthur was saying. "Held in a lonely farmhouse for a couple of nights. Plenty to eat and drink and blankets to keep the cold out. Then they woke up one morning and found their guards had gone."

"But a different procedure in stopping—"

"Yes. This time they came up with a new one—carley rafts, with about ten survivors aboard, dead ahead of the vessel. You know the rest."

Yes, I knew the rest. After that the routine was always the same. The rescued survivors, displaying a marked lack of gratitude, would whip out pistols, round up the crew, tie black muslin bags over their heads so that they couldn't identify the vessel that would appear within the hour to take them off, march them on board the unknown vessel, land them on some lonely beach during the dark, then march them again till they arrived at their prison. A deserted farmhouse. Always a

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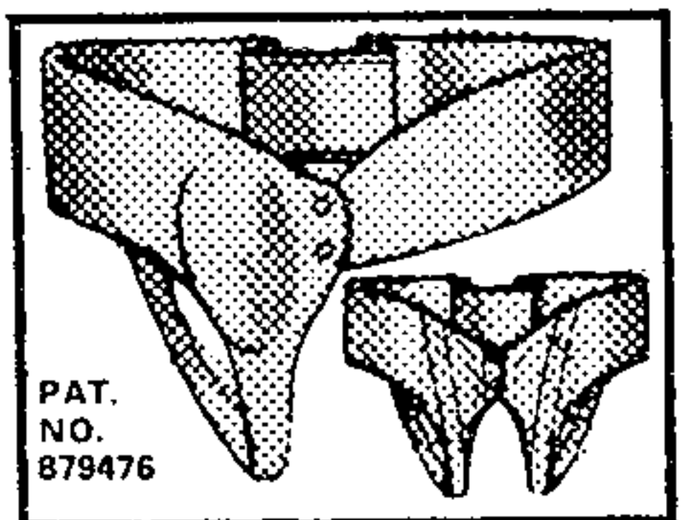

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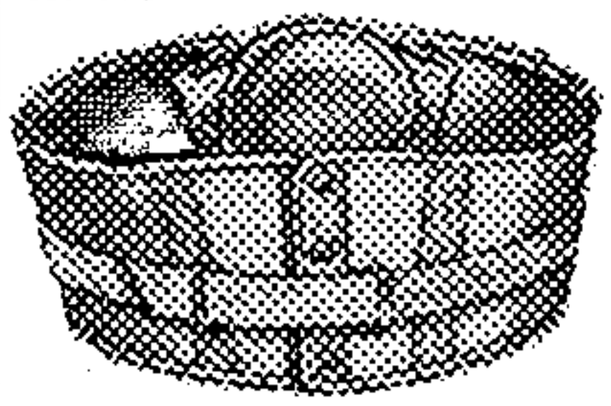

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deserted farmhouse. And always in Ireland. Meantime the prize crew sailed the hi-jacked vessel to God alone knew where and the first the world knew of the disappearance of the pirated vessel was when the original crew, released after two or three days' painless captivity, would turn up at some remote dwelling and start hollering for the nearest telephone.

"Forty-one hours now, Caroline. What have you done?"

For a moment I wondered irritably what the devil he was talking about. Then I remembered. He'd given me forty-eight hours. Seven were gone.

"I've had three hours' sleep." He'd consider that an utter waste of time, his employees weren't considered to need sleep. "I've talked to a wealthy yachtsman, next boat to us here. We're paying him a social call tonight."

There was a pause. "You're doing *what* tonight?"

"Visiting. We've been invited. Harriet and I. For drinks."

"We assume you haven't taken leave of your senses."

"I don't know how the unanimous informed opinion might be about that. I don't think I have."

"Who's the yachtsman?"

I told him. It took me some time, because I had to spell out names with the aid of his damned code-book. When his voice came again it was cagey and wary. As Uncle Arthur couldn't see me, I permitted myself a cynical grin. Even cabinet ministers found it difficult to make the grade as far as Skouras' dinner-table, but the permanent undersecretaries, the men with whom the real power of government lies, practically had their own initialled napkin-rings. Undersecretaries were the bane of Uncle Arthur's life.

"You'll have to watch your step very carefully here."

"Betty and Dorothy aren't coming home any more, Annabelle. Someone has to pay. I want someone to pay. You want someone to pay. We all do."

"But it's inconceivable that a man in his position, a man of his wealth— Dammit all, I know him well, Caroline. We dine together. Know his present wife even better. Ex-actress. A philanthropist like that. Would a man like that, a millionaire like that, spend time and money just to build up a front—"

"I never said I suspected *him*, Annabelle."

"Ah!" It's difficult to convey a sense of heartfelt gladness, profound satisfaction and brow-mopping relief in a single syllable, but Uncle Arthur managed it without any trouble. "Then why go?"

"I want to go aboard. I want to see a transmitter of his that has been smashed. It's a hunch, let me call it, Annabelle. There's something else. I want you to contact the post office savings-bank head office, in Scotland. After that, the record files of some Scottish newspapers."

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"This is more like it, Caroline. What do you want and why?"

So I told him what I wanted and why, lots more of the fancy code work, and when I'd finished he said: "I'll have my staff on to this straight away. I'll have all the information you want by four o'clock this afternoon. What's your next move, Caroline?"

"Bed," I said. "I'm going to get some sleep."

"Of course. Time, as you said, is of the essence. You mustn't waste it, must you, Caroline?" He signed off. He sounded bitter. No doubt he was bitter. But then, insomnia apart, Uncle Arthur could rely on a full quota of sleep during the coming night. Which was more than I could.

I only just managed to catch the last fading notes of the alarm as it went off at ten minutes to four. The sun wasn't down yet, but it might as well have been for all the chance it had of penetrating the rolling masses of heavy dark cloud hurrying away to the eastwards to the inky blackness of the horizon beyond Torbay. The slanting sheeting rain that foamed whitely across the bay further reduced what little visibility there was to a limit of not more than four hundred yards. The village itself, half a mile distant and nestling in the dark shadow of the steeply-rising pine-covered hills behind, might never have existed. Down in the *Shangri-la*'s gleaming galley a master chef would be preparing the sumptuous evening meal, the one to which we hadn't been invited. I tried to put the thought of that meal out of my mind, but I couldn't, so I just put it as far away as possible and followed Hunslett into the engine-room. He took the spare ear-phones and squatted beside me on the deck. I hoped that Uncle Arthur would have something to tell us.

"Congratulations, Caroline," Uncle Arthur said. "You really are on to something." As far as it is possible for a dead flat monotone voice to assume an overtone of warmth, then Uncle Arthur's did just that. He sounded friendly.

"We've traced those post office savings-books," he went on. He rattled off book numbers and details of times and amounts of deposits, things of no interest to me, then said: "Last deposits were on December 27th. Ten pounds in each case. Present balance is £78 14s. 6d. Exactly the same in both. And those accounts have not been closed."

He paused for a moment to let me congratulate him, which I did, then continued: "That's nothing, Caroline. Listen. Your queries about any mysterious accidents, deaths, disappearances off the west coasts of Inverness-shire or Argyll, or anything happening to people from that area. We've struck oil, Caroline. This seems to have been the most disastrous sailing season for years in the west of Scotland. But first, one

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from last year. The *Pinto*, a well-found sea-worthy forty-five-foot motor cruiser left Kyle of Lochalsh for Oban at 8 a.m. on September 4th. She should have arrived that afternoon. She never did. No trace of her has ever been found. Then we come to this year. April 6th and April 26th. The *Evening Star* and the *Jeannie Rose*. Two East Coast fishing-boats—one from Buckie, the other from Fraserburgh, both were based on Oban. Both were lobster boats. The *Evening Star*, the first one to go, was found stranded on the rocks off Islay. The *Jeannie Rose* vanished without trace. No member of either crew was ever found. Then again, on the 17th of May. This time a well-known racing yacht, the *Cap Gris Nez*, an English-built-and-owned craft despite her name, highly experienced skipper, navigator and crew, left Londonderry for the north of Scotland in fine weather. Disappeared. She was found almost a month later. The crew was never found. Then the last case, a few weeks ago—August 8th. Husband, wife, two teenage children, son and daughter. Converted lifeboat, the *Kingfisher*. Vanished. Boat and crew."

"Where did he set out from?"

"Torbay."

That one word made his afternoon. It made mine, too.

"The significance of the dates will not have escaped you?"

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"No, Annabelle, the significance has not escaped me." The Buckie fishing-boat, the *Evening Star*, had been found washed up on Islay three days after the S.S. *Holmwood* had vanished off the south coast of Ireland. The *Jeannie Rose* had vanished exactly three days after the M.V. *Antara* had as mysteriously disappeared in the St. George's Channel. The *Cap Gris Nez*, that had finally landed up on the rocks of Skye, had vanished the same day as the M.V. *Headley Pioneer* had disappeared somewhere off Northern Ireland. And the converted lifeboat, *Kingfisher*, had disappeared, never to be seen again, just two days after the S.S. *Hurricane Spray* had left the Clyde, also never to be seen again. Coincidence was coincidence, but this was plain ridiculous. The odds against such a perfect matching of dates could be calculated only in astronomical terms. I said as much to Uncle.

"Let us not waste time by dwelling upon the obvious, Caroline," Uncle said coldly. "The point is—what is to be done? Islay to Skye is a big area. Where does this get us?"

"How much weight can you bring to bear to secure the co-operation of the television and radio networks?"

"What do you have in mind, Caroline?"

"An insertion of an item in their news bulletins."

"Well." An even longer pause. "It was done daily during the war, of course. I believe it's been done once or twice since. Can't compel them, of course. If they can be persuaded that it's completely apolitical and in the national interest, there's a chance. What do you want?"

"An item that a distress signal has been received from a sinking yacht somewhere south of Skye. Exact position unknown. Signals ceased, the worst feared, an air-sea search to be mounted at first light tomorrow. That's all."

"I may manage it. Your reason, Caroline?"

"I want to look around. I want an excuse to move around without raising eyebrows."

"You're going to volunteer the *Firecrest* for this search and then poke around where you shouldn't?"

"No. What I had in mind was this. At the very eastern tip of Torbay Island, about five miles from the village, there's a small deserted sandy cove, semicircular and well protected by steep bluffs and pine trees. Will you please arrange to have a long-range helicopter there exactly at dawn."

"I'm supposed to snap my fingers and hey presto! a helicopter will be there at dawn," Uncle Arthur said coldly.

"That's fourteen hours from now, Annabelle. At five o'clock this morning you were prepared to snap your fingers and have a helicopter here by noon. Seven hours. Exactly half the time. But that was for something important, like getting me down to London to bawl me out and fire me."

"Call me at midnight, Caroline. I hope to God you know what you are doing."

I said: "Yes, sir," and hung up. I didn't mean, Yes, sir, I knew what I was doing; I meant, Yes, sir, I hoped to God I knew what I was doing.

IF the carpet in the *Shangri-la*'s saloon had cost a penny under five thousand pounds, then old Skouras must have picked it up second-hand somewhere. I'd never seen an item of furnishing like it in my life except for the curtains that covered two-thirds of the bulkhead space. On the port bulkhead hung two Cézannes, on the starboard two Renoirs. The pictures were a mistake. In that room they didn't have a chance. They'd have felt more at home in the galley. So would I. So, I was pretty sure, would Hunslett.

A silent movie picture of the scene would have given no clue as to what was wrong. Everything was so very comfortable, so very civilised. Until you cut in the movie soundtrack, that was.

Skouras had his glass refilled for the fourth time in the forty-five minutes we had been there, smiled at his wife sitting in the armchair across the fire from him, lifted his glass in a toast. "To you, my dear. To your patience in putting up with us all so well. A most boring trip for you, most boring. I congratulate you."

I looked at Charlotte Skouras. Everybody looked at Charlotte Skouras. There was nothing unusual in that—millions of people had looked at Charlotte Skouras when she had been the most sought-after actress in Europe. Even in those days she'd been neither particularly young nor beautiful, she didn't have to be because she'd been a great actress. Now she was even older and less good-looking and her figure was beginning to go. But men still looked at her. She was somewhere in her late thirties.

"You are very kind, Anthony." Charlotte Skouras had a deep slow slightly-foreign-accented voice and, just then, a tired strained smile that accorded well with the darkness under the brown eyes. "But I am never bored. Truly."

"With this lot as guests?" Skouras' smile was as broad as ever. "A Skouras board-meeting in the Western Isles instead of your blue-blooded favourites on a cruise in the Levant? Take Dollmann here." He nodded to the man by his side, a tall thin bespectacled character with receding thin dark hair who looked as if he needed a shave but didn't. John Dollmann, the managing director of the Skouras shipping-lines. "Eh, John? How do you rate yourself?"

"Poorly, I'm afraid, Sir Anthony." Dollmann was as

urbane as Skouras himself, as apparently unconscious of anything untoward in the atmosphere.

Skouras then looked quizzically at the two men sitting close by myself. One, Hermann Lavorski, a big jovial twinkling-eyed man with a great booming laugh and an inexhaustible supply of risqué stories was his accountant and financial adviser. The other, a middle-aged, balding, sphinx-faced character with a drooping handlebar moustache and a head that cried out for a bowler hat, was Lord Charnley, who found it necessary to work as a broker in the City to make ends meet. "And how would you rate our two good friends here, Charlotte?" This was another friendly smile at his wife.

"I'm afraid I don't understand." Charlotte Skouras looked at her husband steadily, not smiling.

"Come now, come now, of course you do understand. I'm still talking about the poor company I provide for so young and attractive a woman as you." He looked at Hunslett. "She *is* a young and attractive woman, don't you think, Mr. Hunslett?"

"Well, now." Hunslett leaned back in his armchair, fingers judiciously steepled, an urbanely sophisticated man entering into the spirit of things. "What is youth, Sir Anthony? I don't know." He smiled across at Charlotte Skouras. "Mrs. Skouras will never be old. For ten million European men—and for myself—Mrs. Skouras was the most attractive actress of her time."

"*Was*, Mr. Hunslett? *Was*?" Old Skouras was leaning forward in his chair now, the smile a shadow of its former self. "But now, Mr. Hunslett?"

"Mrs. Skouras' producers must have employed the worst cameramen in Europe." Hunslett's dark, saturnine face gave nothing away. He smiled at Charlotte Skouras. "If I may be pardoned so personal a remark."

"The days of chivalry are not yet over," Skouras smiled. "But Mr. Hunslett, Mr. Petersen, your glasses are empty."

"You've been very kind, Sir Anthony. We've enjoyed ourselves immensely. But we'd like to get back. It's blowing up badly tonight and Hunslett and I would like to move the *Firecrest* into the shelter of Garve Island."

"So soon? So soon?" He sounded genuinely disappointed. "But of course, if you're worried—" He pressed a button and the saloon door opened. The man who entered was Captain Black, the *Shangri-la*'s skipper.

"Ah, Captain Black. Have the tender brought alongside at once, will you? Mr. Petersen and Mr. Hunslett are anxious to get back to the *Firecrest* as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid there'll be a delay, Sir Anthony."

"Delay?"

"The old trouble, I'm afraid," Captain Black said.

"Those bloody carburettors," Skouras swore. "You were right, Captain Black, you were right. Last tender I'll ever have with petrol engines fitted. Let me know as soon as she's all right."

Black left. Skouras pressed some more whisky on Hunslett and myself. Just before nine o'clock he pressed a button by his arm-rest and the doors of a cabinet automatically opened to reveal a 23-inch TV set.

Uncle Arthur hadn't let me down. The newscaster gave quite a dramatic account of the last message received from the T.S.D.Y. *Moray Rose*, reported not under command and making water fast somewhere to the south of the Island of Skye. A full-scale air and sea search, starting at dawn the next day, was promised.

Skouras switched the set off. "The sea's crowded with damn fools who should never be allowed outside a canal basin. Whether they didn't listen to the forecast or whether they listened and still set out, they must have been lunatics."

"Some of those lunatics may be dying, drowning now. Or already drowned," Charlotte Skouras said.

For perhaps five seconds Skouras, face set, stared at her and then he turned away with a laugh and said to me: "The little woman, eh, Petersen. Tell me, Petersen, are you married?"

I smiled at him while debating the wisdom of throwing my whisky glass in his face or clobbering him with something heavy, then decided against it. Apart from the fact that it would only make matters worse, I didn't fancy the swim back to the *Firecrest*. So I smiled and smiled, feeling the knife under the cloak, and said: "Afraid not, Sir Anthony. Thirty-eight and never had a chance." I went on cheerfully. "The old story, Sir Anthony. The ones I'd have wouldn't have me. And *vice versa*." Which wasn't quite true. The driver of a Bentley with, the doctors had estimated, certainly not less than a bottle of whisky inside him, had ended my marriage before it was two months old. It was then that Uncle Arthur had prised me from my marine-salvage business and since then no girl with any sense would ever have contemplated marrying me if she'd known what my job was. What made it even more difficult was the fact that I couldn't tell her in the first place.

"You don't look a fool to me, if I may say so without offence," Skouras smiled. Then "Charlotte, there's something I want from our stateroom. The picture on my dressing-table."

"What!" She suddenly sat forward in her armchair, hands reaching for the fronts of the arm-rests as if about to pull herself to her feet. Something touched a switch inside Skouras and the smiling eyes went bleak and hard and cold, changing

their direction of gaze fractionally. It lasted only a moment because his wife had caught it even before I did, because she sat forward abruptly, smoothing down the short sleeves of her dress over sun-tanned arms. Quick and smooth, but not quite quick enough. For two seconds the sleeves had ridden nearly all the way up to her shoulders—and nearly four inches below those shoulders each arm had been encircled by a ring of bluish-red bruises. The kind made by a rope.

Charlotte Skouras rose without another word and hurried from the room. She was back inside a moment and handed the picture to Skouras and sat down quickly in her own chair.

"My wife, gentlemen," Skouras said. He rose from his armchair and handed round a photograph of a dark-eyed, dark-haired woman with a smiling face that emphasised the high Slavonic cheek-bones. "My first wife. Anna. We were married for thirty years. Marriage isn't all that bad. That's Anna, gentlemen."

If I'd a gramme of human decency left in me I should have knocked him down and trampled all over him. But I couldn't do it, I couldn't do anything about it. The old coot's heart was in his voice and his eyes. If this was acting, it was the most superb acting I had ever seen. And if it wasn't acting then it was just the picture of a sad and lonely man, no longer young, momentarily oblivious of this world, gazing desolately at the only thing in this world that he ever had loved or ever would love, something gone beyond recall.

If it hadn't been for the other picture, the picture of the still, proud, humiliated Charlotte Skouras staring sightlessly into the fire, I might have felt a lump in my own throat. As it happened, I'd no difficulty in restraining my emotion.

Skouras had fumbled his way back to his seat and was staring before him, his eyes as sightless as those of his wife. The picture lay face-down on his knee. He didn't even look up when Captain Black came in and told us the tender was ready to take us back to the *Firecrest*.

When the tender had left us aboard our own boat we waited till it was halfway back to the *Shangri-la*, closed the saloon door, unbuttoned the studded carpet and pulled it back. Carefully I lifted a sheet of newspaper and there, on the thin film of flour spread out on the paper below it, were four perfect sets of footprints. We tried our two for'ard cabins, the engine-room and the after cabin, and the silk threads we'd so laboriously fitted before our departure to the *Shangri-la* were all snapped.

Somebody had been through the entire length of the *Firecrest*. They could have had at least a clear hour for the job, so Hunslett and I spent a clear hour trying to find out why they had been there. We found nothing, no reason at all.

"Well," I said, "at least we know why they were so anxious to have us aboard the *Shangri-la*."

"To give them a clear field here? That's why the tender wasn't ready—it was here."

"What else?"

"There's something else. I can't put my finger on it. But there's something else."

"Let me know in the morning. When you call Uncle at midnight, ask him to dig up what information he can on those characters on the *Shangri-la* and about the physician who attended the late Lady Skouras. There's a lot I want to know about the late Lady Skouras." I told him what I wanted to know.

"Meanwhile, let's shift this boat over to Garve Island. I've got to be up at three-thirty—you can sleep any time."

I should have listened to Hunslett. But I didn't know then that Hunslett was to have time for all the sleep in the world.

When Hunslett awakened me at three-thirty, he told me Uncle Arthur had managed to get a helicopter laid on, though he considered the expedition a waste of time.

After a tiring trek in the dark through the dank woods of Torbay Island, I finally found the small deserted sandy cove. The helicopter was just coming in for a landing.

I explained to the pilot that I was looking for a place, possibly in some tiny secluded harbour normally invisible from the sea, where a fairly big boat could be hidden. We decided to go twenty miles north and south along the mainland coast first. On this run we saw everything. And we saw nothing.

Coming back to the spot where I had been picked up, we did a circuit of Torbay itself, but this yielded nothing.

Now we flew eastward across Torbay Sound, passing over the storm-torn desolation of Carrara Point, on our way to Loch Houron—the wildest stretch of water and the worst place for boats in the West of Scotland.

Our search began at the most easterly island in Loch Houron, Craigmore, where a group of shark fishermen, whose boss was an Australian called Tim Hutchinson, lived and worked. The local fishermen on the West Coast would vouch for them as a good bunch, said the pilot.

The next island we circled was Ballara. Not even a barnacle would have its home there. The channel between Ballara and the next island, Dubh Sgeir, came into view—the most feared spot of all, called Beul nan Uamh: the mouth of the grave.

The helicopter flew over the east and south coasts of Dubh

Sgeir where, surprisingly, for almost a mile between its headlands, for a distance of two or three hundred yards out from the shore, the waters were black and still. On this island, I learned, was the ancestral home of Lord Kirkside. I decided to land.

We were round to the south of Dubh Sgeir now and suddenly the castle was in sight. Despite its crenellated battlements, round towers and embrasures, it didn't begin to rank with the Windsors and Balmorals of this world. But the site had the Windsors and Balmorals whacked to the wide. It grew straight out of the top of a hundred-and-fifty-foot cliff.

Below the castle, and a fair way to the right of it, a cliff-fall belonging to some bygone age had created an artificial foreshore some thirty yards wide. From this, obviously at the cost of immense labour, an artificial harbour had been scooped out, the boulders and rubble having been used for the construction of a horseshoe breakwater with an entrance of not more than six or seven yards in width. At the inner end of this harbour a boat-house, no wider than the harbour entrance and less than twenty feet in length, had been constructed against the cliff face. A boat-house to berth a good-sized row-boat, no more.

From two hundred feet above the castle, I saw that it was built in the form of a hollow square with the landward side missing. The seaward side was dominated by two crenellated towers, one topped by a twenty-foot flagpole and flag, the other by an even taller TV mast. Surprisingly, the island was not as barren as it had appeared from the sea. Beginning some distance from the castle and extending clear to the cliff-bound northern shore of the island ran a two-hundred-yard-wide stretch of what seemed to be flat smooth turf. We put down in the eastern lee of the castle, close to the cliff edge.

I got out and was rounding the landward corner of the castle when I almost literally bumped into a girl.

I said: "Good afternoon, Miss—um—"

"Engine failure?" she asked coldly.

"Well, no—"

"No? Then this is private property. I must ask you to leave. At once, please."

I bent forward to peer through the wind-blown camouflage of blonde hair. She looked as if she had spent most of the night and half the morning down in the castle wine-cellars.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" she demanded.

"Nothing. The end of a dream. Where's your old man?"

"You mean my father?"

"Sorry. Lord Kirkside."

"I'm Lord Kirkside." I turned round to see the owner of the deep voice behind me—a tall rugged-looking character in his fifties, hawk nose, jutting grey eyebrows and moustache, grey tweeds, grey deer-stalker, hawthorn stick in hand. "What's the trouble, Sue?"

I said: "My name is Johnson. Air-Sea Rescue. There was a boat, the *Moray Rose*, in bad trouble somewhere south of Skye. If she'd been not under command but still afloat she might have come drifting this way. We wondered—"

"And Sue was going to fling you over the cliff before you had a chance to open your mouth?" He smiled affectionately at his daughter. "That's my Sue. I'm afraid she doesn't like newspapermen."

"Some do and some don't. But why pick on me?"

"When you were twenty-one could you, as the saying goes, tell a newspaperman from a human being? I couldn't. But I can now, a mile away. I can also tell a genuine Air-Sea Rescue helicopter when I see one. And so should you too, young lady. I'm sorry, Mr. Johnson, we can't help you. My men and I spent several hours last night patrolling the cliff-tops to see if we could see anything. Nothing, I'm afraid."

"Thank you, sir. I wish we had more voluntary co-operation of this kind. But why newspapermen? Dubh Sgeir isn't quite as accessible as Westminster."

Lord Kirkside smiled, not with his eyes. "You may have heard of—well, of our family tragedy. My elder boy, Jonathan, and John Rollinson—Sue's fiancé."

I knew what was coming. And after all those months she had those smudges under her eyes. She must have loved him a lot. I could hardly believe it.

"I'm no newspaperman, sir. Prying isn't my business." It wasn't my business, it was my life, the *raison d'être* for my existence. But now wasn't the time to tell him.

"The air accident. Jonathan had his own private Beechcraft." He waved towards the stretch of green turf running to the northern cliffs. "He took off from here that morning. The reporters came by helicopter and boat—there's a landing-stage to the west. They weren't well received. Care for a drink?"

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate that. But we haven't many hours of daylight left."

"Of course, of course. How thoughtless of me. But you can't have much hope left by this time."

"Frankly, none. But, well, you know how it is, sir."

"We'll cross our fingers for that one chance in a million. Good luck, Mr. Johnson." He shook my hand and turned away. His daughter hesitated, then held out her hand and smiled.

I went back to the helicopter and we continued on a northward course for another ten minutes. After we were out of sight of watchers on any of the islands, we came round in a great half-circle to west and south and east and headed back for home.

The sun was down and the world below was more night than day as we came in to land on the sandy cove on the eastern side of the Isle of Torbay. I could just vaguely distinguish the blackness of the tree-clad island, the faint silvery gleam of the sand and the semicircular whiteness where the jagged reef of rocks fringed the seaward approach to the cove. It looked a very dicey approach indeed to me but the pilot wasn't worried. And, if he wasn't going to worry, neither was I.

He reached up his hand to flick on the landing lights, but the light came on a fraction of a second before his fingers touched the switch. Not from the helicopter but from the ground. A bright light, a dazzling light, at least a five-inch searchlight located between the high-water line of the cove and the tree-line beyond. For a moment the light wavered, then steadied on the cockpit of the helicopter, making the interior bright as the light from the noon-day sun. I twisted my head to one side to avoid the glare. I saw the pilot throw up a hand to protect his eyes, then slump forward wearily, dead in his seat, as the white linen of his shirt turned to red and the centre of his chest disintegrated. I flung myself forwards and downwards to try to gain what illusory shelter I could from the cannonading sub-machine shells shattering the windscreen. The helicopter was out of control, dipping sharply forward and spinning slowly on its axis. I reached out to grab the controls from the dead man's hands but even as I did, the trajectory of the bullets changed, either because the man with the machine-gun had altered his aim or because he'd been caught off-balance by the sudden dipping of the helicopter. An abruptly mad cacophony of sound—the iron clangour of steel-nosed bullets smashing into the engine casing, mingled with the banshee ricochet of spent and mangled shells.

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Next month: Philip Calvert unravels the mystery of the disappearing ships and discovers the key to it on the remote stormy island of Dugh Sgeir

This Argosy serial is condensed from "When Eight Bells Toll," just published by Collins at 21s.

BOOKS REVIEWED

BY
ARTHUR
POTTERSMAN

L. P. HARTLEY's new novel *The Betrayal* (Hamish Hamilton, 25s.), suggests there is little chance for happiness in human relationships, and little hope for the survival of truth.

Richard Mardick is an elderly novelist who is close to death and who wants to leave some kind of moderately truthful account of his life. To this end he tells his ingratiating young secretary-companion, Denys Aspin, the story of his youthful love affair with Lucy Soames, and how his whole life has been soured by the thought that he was to blame for her possibly suicidal drowning. Mr. Aspin starts to blackmail the dying novelist by threatening to reveal more in the memoir than Mardick would like. When, by coincidence, Mardick becomes friendly with dead Lucy's half-sister, Aspin tightens the screws by threatening to shatter this happy relationship with the truth.

Mr. Aspin leaves Mardick, having bled him about as white as he can, and then other troublemakers descend upon poor Mardick. His housekeeper and nurse turn out to be a pair of vixens. Successive male companions prove to be villains. His own solicitor defrauds him, apparently with impunity, and his doctor proves cold and unhelpful.

All this may seem rather too much for a single gloomy novel. Yet there is more to come. Mardick's friends hear of his "murky past"—and to his great disgust acclaim his youthful experience as a merry, bawdy moment. Lucy's half-sister, with whom he falls in love, hears too and leaves him in horror and tears. Mardick ends his days in particularly gruesome style, with Aspin, now a helpless morphia addict.

The Betrayal seems almost too Job-like, yet I feel that Hartley has written something close to a parable in which not men and women but Greed, Lust, Cruelty, Treachery stalk the world unhindered. Because he is a fine novelist, the parable is not put in elementary clergyman's terms, but through an interesting gallery of very *human* beings.

☐ **TREASURE HUNT** Heroes come in all shapes and sizes, but one of the new thrillers seems to combine three different types of hero. He's a randy university teacher overfond of alcohol, which puts him in the Lucky Jim category. He is pretty sharp at working out a mystery by the conundrum method—discovering the missing treasure by reversing all the instructions on a 2,000-year-old scroll—which relates him to Ellery Queen. And he is bloody-minded enough, though in a fundamentally decent way, and almost witty enough to qualify as a latter-day Philip Marlowe, the detective-hero created by Raymond Chandler. This paragon of these several virtues is Professor Caspar Laing. Widowed, aged somewhere over thirty. Archæologist, and player of brilliant hunches.

In Lionel Davidson's recently-published exciting third novel, *A Long Way to Shiloh* (Gollancz, 25s.), Laing is persuaded by the Israeli Government into deciphering a fragment of scroll. Jewish experts think it provides a clue to the hiding place of treasure removed from the Holy Temple in Jerusalem just before the building was destroyed by Romans in A.D. 70. Laing is driven around Israel by a lovely Yemenite lieutenant from the distaff side of the Israeli army, with whom he flirts right into bed. He is kidnapped by Arab agents, who are also after the treasure. He is constantly getting drunk on Israeli brandy and this results in some funny scenes.

Finally, Laing finds a missing piece of scroll and deciphers it all during a hair-raising sally into Jordanian border territory . . . Yes, this thriller has everything.

☐ **CORRUPTION AND CONSCIENCE** A former policeman has written what is surely the most sensational novel of the autumn. He is Bernard Toms, whose first novel, *George Arbuthnott Jarrett,* was highly praised.

His second book, *The Strange Affair* (Constable, 25s.), is about police corruption on two levels. There is the straightforward business of a Flying Squad Inspector in the pay of a bunch of East End gangsters, but more interesting is the undermining of a young policeman's honesty and concern for

truth. PC Peter Strange, only six weeks out of training school, starts his career determined that only truth shall be his guide. But when involvement with a teenage girl ends up with his appearing on photographs circulated and sold by the gangsters, PC Strange realises that for a policeman, truth is a poor weapon against determined criminals and their quick-witted lawyers.

The wretched truth for PC Strange, however, is that, because he genuinely hates evil, he plants a knife on one of the gangsters—and gets trapped himself. The crooks go free. It's poor young Strange that ends up in jail.

Bernard Toms uses with great effect the inner voice of PC Strange as the judge sentences him, to open and conclude this taut and impassioned novel.

☐ **A LOUT'S LIFE** A new English anti-hero appears in *Alley Jaggers* (Hutchinson, 25s.) by Paul West. Jaggers is twenty-five years old, long-haired and loutish, a plasterer by trade. He neither looks nor smells nice, he certainly doesn't speak nicely. His creator Paul West sums him up like this: "He is Alley, taking up space in the world but not of it, not with it, not much in sympathy with it." He lives in a bedraggled Midlands village sharing a house with his old mum and his young-old slatternly wife.

Why did Alley marry her? He got in too deep, going out with Dot for many months until the village started asking what his intentions were, and Dot herself, fading early, held on to him desperately and possessively.

The sad truth, as Paul West cleverly demonstrates, is that Alley Jaggers is daft. In the end sex proves to be his undoing—when a strange wench jeers at him, he half throws her across a room. She falls awkwardly, breaking her neck, and though Alley disguises her corpse, in a most horrific scene, to look like a crude plaster dummy, the police soon catch up with him. Feeble-minded Alley Jaggers becomes the centre of attention at last. And Dot, his wife, is happy, too, for she can visit her dad at one Home and Alley at another Home easily on alternate days.

☐ **AWAY FROM IT ALL** We all dream about getting away from it all. Hardly one in a thousand can actually fulfil his dream, though. One of this autumn's most remarkable books is by a New Zealander who did just that: he set himself all alone on a Pacific Island, and there he lived for six years.

This real-life Crusoe is Tom Neale. He tells his story in *An Island To Oneself* (Collins, 30s.), an absorbing and quite unaffected piece of writing. To go to a desert island, once you know of one, seems easier than you might suppose. Stores requirements were relatively simple: cat and family, for company and rat-catching; a sack of flour; 24 razor blades—sharpen them in a glass under water. Add six pairs of rubber-soled tennis shoes, two bottles of ink, half-a-dozen spare nibs . . . no gramophone records . . . and no woman. For books: Defoe, Stevenson, Maugham, Dickens—and best loved of all, Conrad's *Lord Jim*.

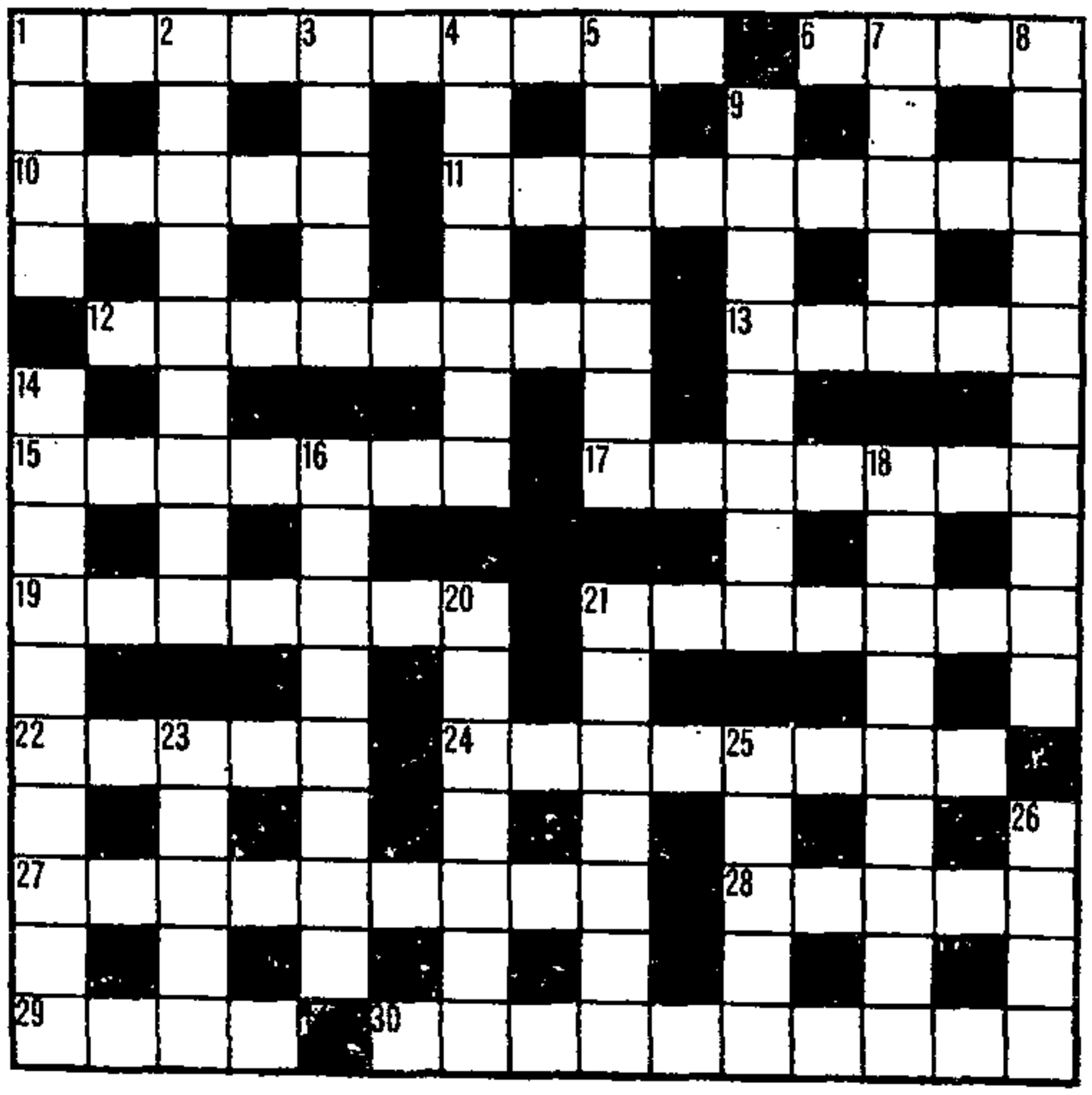
Once on his island, Suvarov, in the South Pacific, Tom Neale lived on fish, which were plentiful, varying this diet with *uto*, a nutritious product of coconuts, and at appropriate seasons, terns' eggs. Even the weather could not upset him, for in the drenching rainy season he simply stayed inside his comfortable shack, reflecting on the unhappy life of a city dweller.

Alas, Tom Neale had to quit his island paradise. The physical strain of living alone, battling nature, proved too much. He dislocated his back, and lay in his shack in a state of almost total paralysis for four days—only the miraculous visit of two young Americans who happened to be sailing across the Pacific for fun and just looked in on what they assumed was a totally deserted island, saved his life. Back in civilisation he became restive. Petrol fumes choked him, trousers, after six years of loin cloths, smothered him. He returned to his island for three more years. Then a growing awareness of old age, combined with the impending arrival of pearl divers, who would make Suvarov somewhat hellish, made him decide he had to return from the wilds for good.

☐ **FACTS WITHOUT FICTION** Zoé Oldenbourg's new book, *The Crusades* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 63s.), is a large and factual account of those great and terrible events. One would hardly expect anything so crude as the "England's Richard Lion-Heart versus Arabia's Black-Hearted Saladin" kind of writing from Miss Oldenbourg, who is, after all, the author of many distinguished historical novels. But for those readers who want the blood and thunder of the Crusades, this new book may come as rather a disappointment. It seems to me to be not much better than the ordinary run of popular historical writing.

ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 & 6 Motored to the border (5, 2, 3, 4).

10 Essayist who gives food for thought? (5).

11 Queen Elizabeth I's favourite hosiery centre (9).

12 I'd resent being put out for one who lives in the place (8).

13 What the best man is expected to do? (5).

15 A white key not manufactured (7).

17 Doctor in family arranged to imbibe! (5, 2).

19 Inspect what comes out of an underground working (7).

21 "When —— die, there are no comets seen" (*Julius Caesar*) (7).

22 Give in to the clamour for immediate suspension? (5).

24 Without these words, you would be! (8).

27 Recitals are given by them (9).

28 He rushes for things outside the account! (5).

29 Fly high to see this river in the Midlands (4).

30 Not of course how caretakers work! (10).

DOWN

1 Gives a name to greases? (4).

2 It plays a key part in any opera (9).

3 One shows no interest in having it! (5).

4 Good advice for machine maintenance? (3–4).

5 This ode is disposed to be elevated (7).

7 Refined Greek is on top? (5).

8 Such magnificence seems an imposition in a famous cricket ground (10).

9 Dividing the band after Eve's return! (8).

14 Emphasises the importance of submarine cables? (10).

16 BR chief explaining where motorised transport takes over (8).

18 Sounds as though hikers' bags are for sleeping in! (9).

20 Pen in an envelope (7).

21 Visibly hurt? (7).

23 Standard article for a girl (5).

25 "I am ——, I contain multitudes" (Whitman) (5).

26 The spy is deprived of this notice! (4).

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Their testimony was reinforced by the editress of a great national periodical who spoke of the need for competent instruction in the writing of features intended for publication.

Further tributes to the LSJ were broadcast last year on January 28th, March 1st and October 20th.

A warning was given about the doubtful value of the claims made by certain schools. If you seek our advice, you will not be lured by lavish promises or bombarded with letters urging enrolment upon you. If you decide to become a member, you will work under a personal coach and your work will be fully criticised and returned promptly . . . no waiting for weeks or even months.

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